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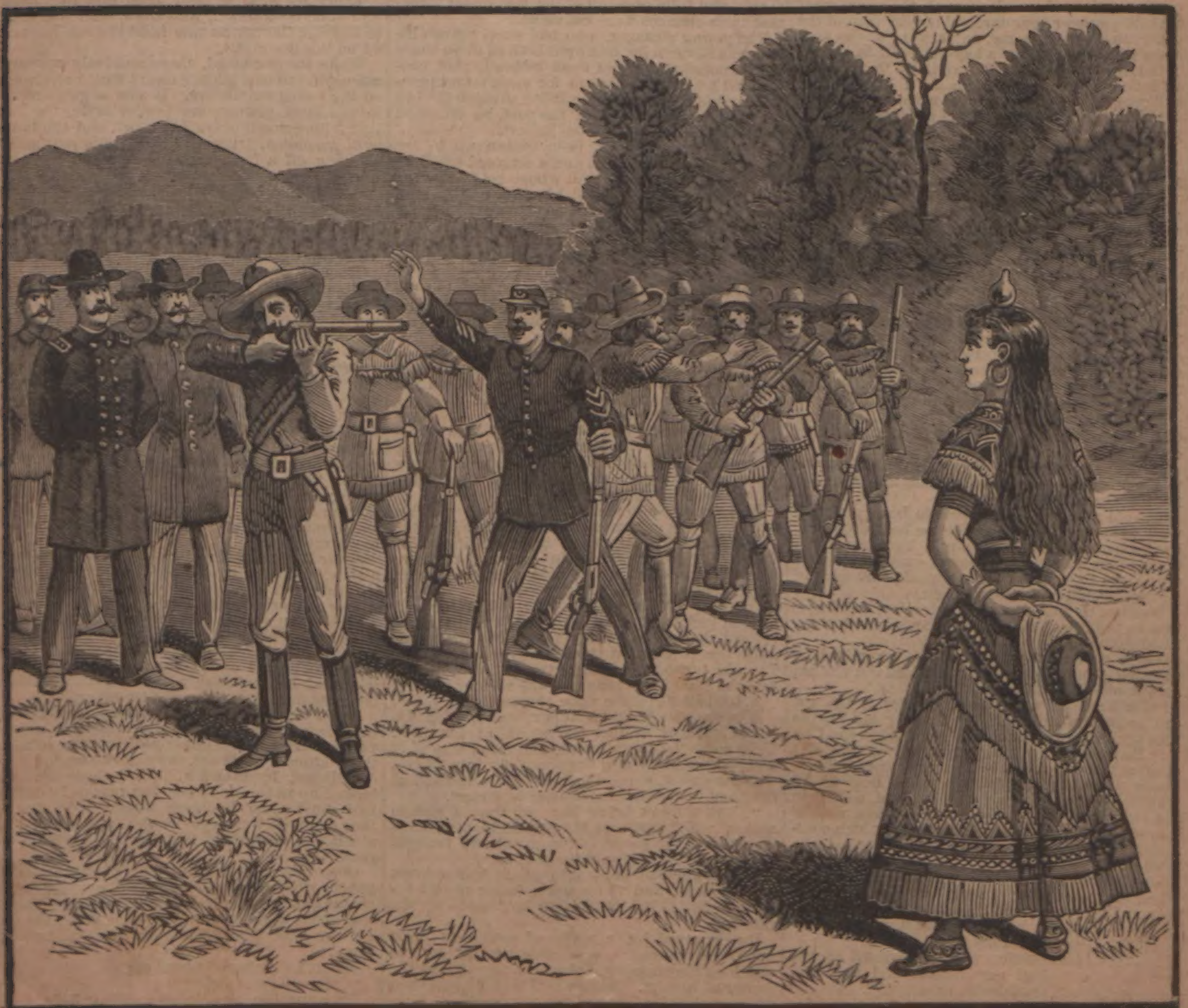
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The Marked Moccasin: or, PANDY ELLIS' PARD.

By MARLINE MANLEY.



Something like an inarticulate cry came from the throng as they saw the girl place the gourd upon her fair head and stand like a statue. All eyes followed the motion of the young man as he raised his rifle. "Stop!" said a voice, hoarse with rage and something else besides, "this is madness."

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The Marked Moccasin;

OR PANDY ELLIS' PARD.

By MARLINE MANLY

Author of "Pandy Ellis," "Dick Sharpley, the Cincinnati Detective," "Gold Gulch," "Old Sphinx," "Pearl Prince," "Diamond Cut Diamond," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

SILVER RIFLE, THE PRAIRIE SHARPSHOOTER.

"PAINTERS an' powderhorns! the man what sez this stranger hyar daren't take his turn at the mark must run agin me, an' they do say as how it are wuss nor tacklin' a hay-cutter than ter git in the way o' this hoss. Step right up thar, boyee, an' let any critter dar dispute it. I kin lick ther hull crowd an' a dog under the wagon. You hear me? It's Roaring Ralph Rockwood what sez it, you bet!"

The scene was a stirring one.

Fully fifty men and boys had gathered in the forest to compete for a prize put up by the colonel of the military post, and the reader has become familiar with such a gathering, so that it would be useless in my describing buckskin clad men who have naught to do with my story.

There had been some dissatisfaction expressed because a young man, who was a stranger to all of them, desired to take a turn at the target; but these murmurs had now ceased.

Two reasons for this could be given.

In the first place, the proclamation of the colonel, which had been posted in a prominent position, declared that any one who chose could enter the lists and compete for the prize, and as that officer now appeared in sight the grumblers did not wish to cause an investigation, well knowing that they would not come out of it with flying colors.

Then again, Roaring Ralph was a man known to every one of them, and they dare not excite his ire, for fear of the result.

The old ranger did not seem to be acquainted with the young man whose cause he advocated, but he had seen him before, and knowing something of his marvelous shooting qualities, desired a chance to witness the astonishment of the gathered soldiers and bordermen.

Besides, he was a lover of fair play, and knew that by the rules the desired marksman was entitled to the shot.

There was another motive, too, as might be gleaned from the few words which the veteran ranger uttered to himself:

"Tar heels an' turpentine! wonder if the gal are anywhars around. I'd like ter lay my ole peepers on her beautiful face agin. How kin I do it? Ha! throw my sculp ter a Pawnee dog ef I ain't got ther game right in my hands. Soup-bones and sourkraut, thar's Reckless Rupert; I'll wait till it comes down to a fine point, and then get him ter try his fancy shot, fur thar's nothin' like strategy in all these things," with which comfortable reflection the veteran trapper lapsed into silence.

He chanced to be watching the young stranger when the colonel drew near, and was surprised to see him give a start, and pull his broad-brimmed hat still lower, so that it would be impossible to distinguish his face.

This significant action told the shrewd ranger that these two had met before, and that the younger man did not desire recognition.

The presence of the colonel was the signal for the beginning of the sport, and presently every

one who had entered the lists had taken a shot at the target, and one-third of the number found themselves debarred from further attempts.

A second round was shot at a more difficult target, and fully one-half of the remainder found that their chances were cut short.

The young stranger, who had simply given his name as Silver Rifle, had fired both of these times with a nonchalance and dead certainty that proclaimed his utter contempt for such target practice, and his action had not failed to catch the eye of the champion shot of the past, he who had been designated as Reckless Rupert.

The match had really been gotten up to try conclusions between him and a sergeant who had lately come to the post, and whose reputation as a marksman had preceded him, for no one suspected for an instant that a rival would appear for the champion in any one else.

Astonishment was, therefore, ripe when the sergeant missed the now difficult mark, and the contest was now limited to these two.

The colonel, disappointed and chagrined at the failure of his man to acquit himself creditably, now took a new and feverish interest in this new opponent of Reckless Rupert's. He leaned forward and scanned him eagerly from head to foot as if forcibly reminded of some one, and then shook his head sternly as though he would not allow such ideas to remain in his brain.

Meanwhile, the sports went on.

Reckless Rupert was rather pleased than otherwise to discover that he had met a foeman worthy of his steel, and every device that an ingenious brain and a keen marksman could devise was brought to bear upon the matter.

He soon began to realize that he had met his match, for not only were his shots copied to the minutest detail, but in many instances improved upon. For once Reckless Rupert was in despair; but at this moment a few words from Roaring Ralph caused his face to brighten.

Carefully he loaded his rifle, while the old ranger, picking up a wild gourd, walked away toward the east, carefully measuring his paces until the required distance was passed over. Then he turned and held out the gourd, which was the size of an orange, by the slender neck.

A dead silence came upon the assembly.

Like a statue Reckless Rupert stood, with his cheek pressed against the stock of his rifle. Then came the sharp report, and those who were watching intently saw the gourd fly into pieces, while the neck, several inches long, remained in the hand of the old imperturbable ranger.

"Ef that don't bring her out then I reckon nothin' will," muttered the Colorado ranger, as he gathered the pieces of the gourd and brought them to the crowd for examination.

The gourd had burst into about half a dozen large pieces, and these upon being placed together showed the little bluish hole made by the rifle ball.

Rupert stood by, a smile of conscious pride upon his tanned face. Roaring Ralph was watching the unknown sharpshooter out of the corner of his eye. He saw him hesitate, and then walk quickly forward to the spot where he himself had stood while holding the gourd.

Then placing a whistle to his mouth he blew several sharp notes upon it, waited a few minutes and repeated the signal, which it undoubtedly was.

Every eye was fastened upon him in wonder, all but Roaring Ralph, who knew what was about to happen, though he was none the less interested on this account.

While they watched, there suddenly appeared among the trees a gliding figure which approached the young marksman. It was a girl, dressed in the most picturesque border style, her long hair falling down below her waist, and the fawn-skin garments, trimmed with beads and quills, showing off a form that Venus might have envied.

Putting into her hand a round gourd not over half the size of the one Reckless Rupert had broken, he uttered a few words in a low tone, and then walked toward the others as if carefully measuring the distance.

Then he wheeled about.

Something like an inarticulate cry came from the throng as they saw the girl place the gourd upon her fair head and stand there like a statue. All eyes followed the motion of the young man as he raised his rifle.

"Stop!" said a voice, hoarse with rage and something else besides, "this is madness. Would you let him imperil the life of that fair creature? In the name of humanity, stop him, and he is welcome to the prize."

It was Reckless Rupert who gave vent to these words, and his face was aflame with various emotions. His eyes were glued upon the form of the young girl, and it was plain to all that this was not the first time he had seen her, for her presence under such peculiar circumstances affected him strangely.

Silver Rifle turned and gave him a scrutinizing glance, and then looked toward Roaring Ralph, who stepped forward ready to champion the young sharpshooter through.

With his usual characteristic address, the old Colorado ranger announced his perfect willingness to "everlastingly chaw to shark's meat" the man that dared oppose the venture of his protégé, and showed such a cheerfulness in making the statement that there was no taker.

Again Silver Rifle bent his head; the weapon became as steady as a rock, and after a brief pause, during which one could almost have heard the beating of his heart, the report sounded.

"Missed, by thunder!" cried those who had looked up in the air to see the pieces fly as they had done when Reckless Rupert fired, but as they dropped their eyes to the head of the girl it was discovered that the small gourd was gone.

One of the men ran out and returned with the gourd, which had two holes in it, so close to the center that the target had not broken. This he was about to show to the colonel, when the girl, for the first time, turned her face full towards them.

The officer uttered a loud cry.

"My soul! it is Dolly!"

Then turning, he pointed to Silver Rifle.

"Seize that man! Fifty dollars to the one who

lays him by the heels! Quick, or he will escape!" he thundered out.

The prairie sharpshooter dashed away, but a dozen would have been in pursuit had not Roaring Ralph sprang to the front and faced them, knife in hand, his bearded face flushed with fury.

"Dust my Sunday breeches, if I don't clean out the hull kit o' ye yet. Silver Rifle kim hyar at my invitation, an' he shall go clear. Whatever grudge ther kernal may hev agin him must keep. Now, ther gone. Kernal, what do ye know o' that gal?"

"Know of her!" almost gasped the enraged officer; "confound your impudence, Rockwood! *that girl is my daughter Dolly!* As to the young man, he is one who has sworn war to the knife against me, and who will yet feel the weight of my anger."

CHAPTER II.

TO THE DEATH.

"GREASER, yer a cheat and a swindle!"

As the words were spoken, the man giving utterance to them sprang to his feet, and with remarkable agility swept the gold from the table into his pocket.

Astonishment had held his opponent mute for the moment, but he, too, sprang to his feet, uttering loud exclamations.

Drawing a knife, he would have sprung at the hunter had not the buckskin-clad worthy covered him with a revolver.

Lowering glances were cast upon him from many of the inmates of the den, but he seemed as cool as a cucumber.

"I've been in jest this same position afore now, an' don't keer a continental how soon ye begin operations. Ther'll be some hefty work for the coroner, I reckon, afore we've done. Is thar a man hyar what knows me?"

"I do," came a voice at this instant, and all eyes were turned toward the speaker, a squatty man, dressed in buckskin and wearing a huge felt hat. "I have cause to remember you. Gentlemen, take a look at my classical head. You will be pleased to notice that I am minus a fine pair of ears. That I owe to him."

As the stumpy hunter spoke, he removed his broad-brimmed felt hat, and swept back the mass of dark hair that was allowed to cover his neck. Sure enough, his ears were gone. The act also showed his face to be considerably slashed with old knife wounds.

The old ranger laughed, as if tickled at the sight of the earless man.

"Yas, I sliced 'em off fur ye, Yeller Bob. Thet war afore ye gained yer present notoriety, an' when we cort ye stealin' our pelts up on ther Big Horn. Glad ter meet yer ag'in. Can't ye stir up a circus fur me hyar? Ther wolf blood hez been lyin' quiet in me so long that I'm afraid they'll think I'm under ther daisies along ther border, ef I don't kick up a rumpus soon."

This dare-devil request rather staggered all who heard it, and the squatty, buckskin-clad ranger glared around him as though too full of rage to answer.

"You will have enough of it to keep you awake, my fire-eater, for if I can help it you will never leave here alive. Gentlemen," he continued, turning to the crowd, "allow me to introduce to you a man who has been the bane of the border among our class for twenty years past, and ag'in whom I have a death-grudge—Pandy Ellis."

As the name of the noted Indian fighter fell upon the ears of those assembled in the Deadwood gambling den, it was amazing to see how they shrank from him, as they would from one who had the small-pox.

It rather tickled the old man to see that he was not quite forgotten in the neighborhood, and bending down a trifle he drew a fifteen-inch bowie knife from the back of his neck.

"Now I'm ready ter sail in. Guv ther word, Yaller Bob, an' see how soon I kin clean ther ranch out. Down in Santa Fe, ye 'member, I laid ten men on ther floor, an' I'd like ter keep up my reputation in this region. Yaller Bob, why don't yer say sail in?"

At this instant a tall form sprang through the open door and alighted at the side of the old ranger, who turned like a flash, ready to use either bowie or revolver; but a light flashed over his face as he recognized in the tall, handsome ranger one whom he had not seen for many months, and whom he little expected to come across in Deadwood.

"Blue Bill!" he exclaimed.

"You bet—and ready to help in the good work of cleaning out this den!" And the tall ranger also brought a revolver into view.

There was something of a sensation at the men-

tion of his name, for it was not unknown among the men assembled there.

"Proceed with ther show, Yaller Bob—that's a good feller," insinuated old Pandy.

"To oblige you, I will. Comrades, be ready to sail in, and the man that drives his knife into the heart of Pandy Ellis gets my bonanza claim."

As Yellow Bob spoke, he suddenly turned a screw close at hand—a contrivance of the bartender's—and all the lights in the place were extinguished at once.

This was a neat little contrivance on the part of the proprietor, whereby he might escape should his life ever be threatened.

No sooner had darkness come upon the scene than the most tremendous uproar ensued. Loud oaths and cries rent the air, accompanied by a smashing sound of glass. Indeed, it seemed for a time as though Bedlam had been let loose, but not a pistol shot was heard.

Pandy Ellis and his comrade stood close to where they had been when the lights went out, ready to engage in a desperate hand to hand struggle for life, but as the racket gradually grew less in volume, what seemed to be the truth broke in upon their minds.

It was so simply ridiculous that they had to laugh outright.

All of the ruffians had skulked away.

By this time the noise had ceased entirely, and all that could be heard was a series of most melancholy grunts and whispered curses from one of the windows.

Old Pandy struck a match and applied it to one of the lamps in the place, which immediately gave them the benefit of its light.

There, stuck fast in one of the windows, was the redoubtable Yellow Bob. He had evidently been crawling out backward when the heavy sash fell across his back, pinning him there. Some one who had been pulling at his lower extremities outside, ran off as soon as the light appeared.

The two hunters laughed loud and long at the ludicrous situation of the rascal, and then Blue Bill, with an eye to business, swept what loose change that remained upon the various tables into his pocket, to reimburse them for their trouble, after which the two rangers left the place.

It was some ten minutes later, while Yellow Bob was making a solemn oath to be the death of both of them, that Pandy and Blue Bill stood face to face in a lone cabin on the outskirts of the town.

"Then you are on the trail?" asked Bill.

"I have started on it, an' will foller ter ther death. There's stirring times ahead, Billy," returned Pandy.

"Right you are, and I'm with you, old man. Here's to the death."

The parties shook hands, and the compact was sealed.

CHAPTER III.

WOLF BLOOD.

THE far north-west.

Glorious old Sol was just hanging in the west like a ball of fire, and evening was close at hand, when two men broke through the bushes that bordered a clear stream of water, and stood upon the sloping bank.

There they stood, leaning upon their rifles, and looking around upon the peaceful scene. What mission had brought these two stern men so far away from all points of civilization? This will be speedily made manifest.

After a cursory glance around them, the two sat down upon an old log that was moss-covered. Vegetation grew in luxuriance around, but there was none of that superabundance found in the equatorial forest, that impedes travel while it presents a charming picture.

This was not the season for trapping, and the red-skins were reported unusually fierce, so that their object must be indeed a strange one to bring them to this part of the country.

"Up to this time, old hoss, you have put off telling me the full particulars of the case, and now, while we sit here, I want you to relate the whole story. I am with you, first, last, and all the time, as you may understand by my coming to this wild part of the country." And Blue Bill drew out his pipe, charged it, and began puffing away as though taking it easy.

Pandy Ellis remained silent for perhaps a full minute, gazing at vacancy, as though his thoughts were far away. A troubled look came upon his face at the same time, and he winked rapidly, as if striving to keep back any womanly symptoms of sorrow.

"Tain't a very pleasant subject ter think about, Billy, but I hev in part grown used ter it, an' will tell yer ther story jest as I know it. What thar air missin' yer imagination must supply.

"Bolly and I had separated, fur I had some business down in Mexico, while Bolly wanted to see some friends in Arkansas. It war several months afore I managed ter reach Little Rock, an' ye may well imagine ther news I heard liked ter hev killed me outright. Bolly hed once hed a brother, which he thought were dead. Many a time hez he told me o' ther lively times they hed together as boyees.

"It seems thet he hed been looked on as dead fur years back; so wen a half drunken galoot run agin him in Little Rock in the dark, he knocked him down. I never could understand jest how it war; all I know is thet they hed a regular duel on ther spot, wid some friends on each side.

"Bolly was jest rekivering from a sick spell, an' I reckon his hand warn't as steady as it might a been. His man fell but got up agin. Bolly lay thar, shot through ther heart."

The old ranger bowed his head in his hands for a few minutes as though the story was too much for him, and Blue Bill could see his gaunt frame trembling with emotion. Presently he looked up again, but there was a strained expression on his thin face, and a fierce glitter in his eyes that had made many a border scoundrel tremble to see.

"I heerd it all through Ned Price. Thar war a time when I didn't like Ned, 'cause I thort he war ther kind o' a critter ter stab a man in ther back; but when I heerd how he keered fur my pore pard, Bolly Wherrit, I shook his hand, an' swore I hed wronged him. I seen him cringe like, but never cud tell why he did it.

"Ter proceed with ther sad story.

"Ned took Bolly off an' hed him buried, while Jack Wherrit skipped the town. From some I heerd thet he war terribly worked-up when he found thet he hed killed his brother, but run fur fear some o' ther boyees 'd take vengeance on him, ther cowardly brute.

"I would ter Heaven I hed happened inter Little Rock about thet time; ther'd been a terrible time, fur I'd hev cut ther drunken coward's weas-and out. I've been on his trail ever since, an' I'll foller him ter ther end o' ther world onless death steps in an' takes a lead. When I find him—the slayer o' my pard—then woe ter him, Blue Bill, woe ter him!"

The old ranger's voice trembled with rage, and Blue Bill knew that when the end came, and he was face to face with Jack Wherrit, the reckoning would be terrible indeed.

"Ther trail hez been plain to me, fer ther man hez ther family mark o' the Wherrits—his left foot air crooked, an' everywhar ye kin tell him by the moccasin track. I've known Bolly war near often, when accordin' ter my calculation he should hev been far away, jist acause I kim acrost that marked moccasin.

"Taint like an ordinary trail, fur ther fellow can't change it ter save his life. Ther family mark were not quite so strong in Bolly, but it hez had much ter do wid his life. Twice, ter my knowledge, he came near going under, 'cause some critters what had a grudge agin him followed ther trail o' ther marked moccasin.

"Then agin it has done him several good turns. Thar war one in particular that comes ter my mind. Bolly war in a bad fix. He had run agin Yaller Bob—ther very critter we hed ther disturbance with at Deadwood—an' his gang o' sweet angels, an' after frustratin' three o' 'em, ther boyee found himself a prisoner. They hated Bolly like bloody pizen, an' it took 'em quite a while ter hitch up an idear by which he should shuffle off this mortal coil, as ther feller sez.

"They hit it at last.

"Now, I've known Bolly ter be in quite a number o' unpleasant perdicyments. Thar war, fur instance, the time wen he fell inter ther hands o' ther Hudson Bay trappers arter tumblin' inter ther queer ole mound whar the Blackfeet buried ther dead centuries ago. They tied him ter a log an' set him afloat that time, and a pesky affair he had o' it wen ther ole log tried ter turn.

"Then ag'in I 'member down in Mexico somewhere, Bolly shut himself in a cabin wid four human devils an' flit it out. Now, that warn't much fer an ole codger like me ter do—I've been shut up with a score an' left half o' 'em lyin' thar dead—but I thought it too reckless in ther boyee, fur he never war sich a devil in a fight as the ole man when he gits on ther rampage.

"I could tell ye o' half a dozen more cases whar Bolly found himself bad off, but none o' 'em 'd ekal this un.

"Them critters had fastened him ter a powder keg, lighted the fuse, an' left him ter watch death creepin' toward him in the fire. Why, it makes me shudder jest ter think o' it.

"I run ag'in that marked moccasin trail, an' kim in sight jest at ther critical moment, but I hed no hand in savin' ther lad from ther powder; he did thet himself.

"Jest afore they left him, he coolly begged, as a last favor, that Yaller Bob give him a good chaw o' 'bacca, an' ther critter, suspectin' n'thin', done it. When they war out o' sight, what did Bolly do but salivate ther powder o' ther train, so that when ther fire kim along it war extinguished at this wet place.

"I found him sittin' thar, chewin' away as contentedly as a cow at her cud. Jest as I released the lad the pesky outlaws kim up, wonderin' why they hadn't heerd no explosion. We had quite a tussle with 'em, an' Bolly fit like a king. Ah, me! ter think ther lad'll never stand side by side with me ag'in. It's enough ter make one shed tears o' blood! You an' me make a team, Blue Bill, but ye could never be to me what my old pard war. Fur nigh on ter forty years we hev clung ter each other, an' it do seem as though Pandy Ellis war now an old trunk with ther limbs chopped off. My curse on Jack Wherrit!"

From behind the log, further on, a man's face arose. His eyes were fastened upon the old ranger, and he seemed fascinated by the emotion of Pandy Ellis. Now and then a shudder passed over his frame, but he lay there among the trailing vines, motionless, until Blue Bill sprang to his feet, with an exclamation:

"Look! here's the very trail we lost at noon. Fortune has brought us to it again. There can be no mistaking that footprint. The wretch has been here, has even sat upon this log!"

Pandy Ellis sprang erect.

"My soul, I'm lost!" was the thought of the hidden man, as he drew back his head and flattened himself out still more against the log.

"Yas, he's been hyar; that's ther mark o' ther pizen sarpint—ther wretch thet made ole Pandy Ellis wuss nor a widower. Would ter Heaven we hed come sooner! His time air drawin' near, an' may my arm wither if it fails me when ther hour comes to avenge Bolly's death! Oh, I could tear the devil limb from limb, an' hurl him inter the gates o' hades piece meal! Would that ther war tortures ekal to a thousand deaths, ther murderer o' my pard should feel 'em all!"

"Come, old man, you are exciting yourself too much. This wolf-blood in you must find an outlet soon, or you'll have one of your crazy spells. Let us hunt a camp down the river, and in the morning follow this trail here—to death!"

"Yes, to death!" muttered the old ranger, arising and walking after his comrade.

Ah, if he had but known that it was the presence of the reptile they sought that made him so restless, he might have found a vent for the savage wolf-blood.

When the forms of the two trappers had been lost among the trees and gathering twilight, the craven, Jack Wherrit, crept out of his place of concealment, and with a white, set face, skulked away, trembling and yet desperate as a wolf at bay.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPECTER CANOE.

THE spot where the two hunters pitched their camp was one quite different from that which they had recently left.

They were in the mouth of a ravine, and while the river could still be seen in front, back of them lay a dense thicket, and on either side were the giant forest trees.

Night had come, with all the accompanying noises. The stars looked down from the blue heavens, but it would be some time before the moon put in an appearance.

Blue Bill had started a small fire, which was almost invisible twenty feet away, as it was built in a hole dug in the ground. Over this the handsome ranger was cooking some venison, while Pandy lay near by watching the operation with half-closed eyes, a trick of the veteran trapper.

When the meat was ready, they plunged in without further ceremony. There may be something in the grace said at some tables, but with many it becomes a mere form. The truest way of showing thankfulness is to prove it by fully enjoying whatever is set before us.

Supper over, the two men allowed the fire to go out, and settled themselves for a smoke. Knowing that they were in a dangerous country, where the Blackfeet were as thick as bees in a hollow tree, they puffed their smoke in almost complete silence, exchanging only a few sentences occasionally, and these in a low tone.

Finally Pandy proposed sleep, and to this Blue Bill readily acquiesced, for they had tramped many miles during the day just spent, and Pandy was ready to acknowledge that when it came to a tramp he was not the man he used to be in his younger days.

They had already made rude couches of leaves and hemlock branches, and upon such beds they

had passed many a night in slumber, so that these were deemed comfortable resting places.

The night passed on.

Jupiter led his hosts across the blue firmament, in the ceaseless march of time. Almost overhead the god of war, fiery Mars, glowered down like an eye of evil upon the slumbering earth.

Strange noises came from the forest, near and far, but the howling of wolves and cries of various nocturnal birds and beasts would have been music in the ears of a backwoodsman.

In the east the moon arose, looking like a Chinese shield of silver hung in the heavens, and in places where her light found an ingress between the tall trees that lined the river bank, it trembled softly upon the water.

There was an indescribable witchery in the hour that acted like a charm.

It could not have been very far from midnight when old Pandy Ellis raised his head from the ground, and held it in a listening attitude. From long service in the backwoods, his ears had become acute in a marvelous degree, and on many an occasion he had proven this.

The sound that reached him was the light dip of a paddle upon the water, but it must have been something of more power than this that had waked him up.

Gaining his feet, he laid a hand on the arm of Blue Bill, who responded to the touch almost instantly.

The two men then crept down the ravine to the river, which was speedily spread out before them. At this point the stream was about twelve or fifteen yards across from bank to bank, and just even with them the moon lit up its surface for a stretch of half a score of feet.

Closer comes the sound of the paddle, and it was evident that the canoe was near at hand. Both men gripped their rifles nervously, for thoughts had entered their minds that it might prove to be the man they sought, and the eyes of old Pandy seemed to flash fire at the idea.

In imagination Pandy was once more kneeling upon the lonely grave of his old pard, renewing the oath of vengeance; and was it necessary to chase the murderer over the whole world, he and Blue Bill would do it, so that in the end Bolly's death was avenged.

Closer came the mysterious bark.

There was a singular regularity in the strokes that fell upon old Pandy's ear as unnatural. The person who used the paddle must be an adept, indeed, to wield it with such precision.

"Thar it is!" said Blue Bill.

Looking up the stream, the two men could see the shadowy outlines of a boat, with a human figure standing erect in it. The vessel was speeding down the river with lightning rapidity, and even while they watched, it reached the edge of the illumined spot, and shot into view.

The occupant of this spectral craft was a man, dressed in trapper costume; and, as his hat was off, they could see his long white hair streaming down upon his shoulders.

Only for a few seconds did the white bark canoe remain in sight, and then both the vessel and its occupant were lost to view in the semi-gloom beyond.

Pandy Ellis caught Blue Bill's arm in a grip of steel, and his voice was husky, as he said:

"Did ye see him, Billy? Heaven help me! That war the speerit o' my old pard, on whose grave I swore that terrible oath. Ther ghost o' Bolly Wherrit cries aloud for vengeance!"

CHAPTER V.

ON THE WAR-PATH.

BOTH Pandy Ellis and Blue Bill remained motionless for a full minute after the phantom canoe and its ghastly occupant had disappeared.

The words of the old ranger added to the strangeness of the spell that bound them. Finally Blue Bill raised his hand and dashed it across his face. Of the two, perhaps, he had the least touch of superstition in his nature; or it might be that Bolly Wherrit's death did not seem so real to him, through mere hearsay, as to the old veteran who had knelt upon the grave of his chum away down near Little Rock.

At any rate Blue Bill fancied there must be something wrong, and his action in throwing up his hand was to ascertain whether or no he was dreaming. Upon being re-assured as to his state of wakefulness, he turned upon his companion.

"I am puzzled, old man. If I didn't understand that he was dead, I'd surely say we had seen your old pard. You are quite positive that Bolly went under?" he asked.

A grim smile appeared on Pandy's thin face.

"I tell ye, Billy, my oath war taken on his grave. Ned Price told me ther whole yarn, an' took me ter whar he had buried ther ole man. No, ther ain't ther least doubt in my mind but

what we hev seen ther ghost o' my pard. They say murdered men's spirits haunt ther man what sent them outer ther world, an' I reckon poor Bolly can't rest easy till retribution overtakes Jack. He looked as natural as life, did Bolly. Come, let us go back ter our camp, Billy; this thing hez upset me completely."

Truth to tell, the old ranger's hand was trembling as it had never been known to do in the face of the greatest danger. Feeling that the dead had visited him, perhaps to urge the pursuit of Jack Wherrit more keenly, he was worked up to a tremendous pitch of excitement.

They sat upon their couches for some time, and talked the matter over. Pandy finally convinced Blue Bill as to the truth of his assertion, and he was just as firm a believer as the veteran in the existence of a disembodied spirit. That they had looked upon the specter of murdered Bolly Wherrit neither of them doubted in the least.

Blue Bill finally lay down and passed into the land of Nod, but old Pandy started up his pipe and lay there reflecting on the marvelous spectacle upon which his eyes had rested.

Believing, as he did, that he had been the recipient of a visit from the dead, the old man grew very solemn while thinking of the past. Without the comrade who had been at his side in almost every difficulty in which he had been engaged, the future looked black indeed, and the old ranger dared not spend much time in contemplation of it.

The past had more charms for him, and in thinking of it Pandy felt the tears crowding his eyes. He looked sharply at Blue Bill, as if ashamed lest his emotion should be seen, but the dashing ranger was locked fast in the arms of Morpheus.

That midnight vigil was never forgotten by old Pandy, for the full tide of his loss came rushing upon him, and he bowed his head in grief.

Gradually, however, the pain passed away, and he calmly looked to the future. He was an old man, already past the time allotted to human beings, and through all his life he had been almost miraculously saved from scores of dangers when all hope seemed gone.

Perhaps his time was near at hand, and Heaven had taken this means of warning him. Well, let the grim monster come; he had faced him too often to fear him now. He had ever raised his hand in defense of right, and the weak against wrong, and his brave soul would meet the Master of Life with not a stain upon it, other than those which will assail even the best of men.

His cogitations were interrupted.

The conviction suddenly came upon the old trapper that there was something moving upon the bank of the ravine, for his ears had not been hurt by age, and were as keen as ever.

Instantly Pandy was on the alert.

He turned his gaze upward, while his hand, almost unconsciously, as it were, reached out and grasped his trusty rifle. A bush rustled, and immediately his eyes were glued upon it.

The moon had made its appearance above the bank, and this very bush reached to its lower edge, so that if aught appeared above the twigs it must be plainly outlined against the silver disk that hung in the blue sky.

Ha! no wonder the old trapper started and clutched his rifle more firmly. There arose from behind the bush the feathered head of a Blackfoot brave. His ebon hair hung in straggly masses from his scalp, and was profusely decorated with feathers and other gaudy embellishments.

As the moon was behind him his face was not outlined, but it was easy enough to picture it, glaring with rage and triumph, the eyes fastened upon the two trappers below; for as the moon had now gained quite a high altitude, her rays fell upon both of them.

Pandy remained as motionless as a statue, his eyes glued upon the silhouette of the red-man, as placed against the bright face of the moon.

Thus for a few minutes matters remained stationary.

Then the Indian's arms were slowly elevated, part of a bow came into sight, and it could be seen that he had already fitted an arrow to the string. His eyes were fastened upon the form of Blue Bill, probably because the dashing ranger lay in a little more prominent position.

Did he intend firing?

There could hardly be a question in relation to this fact, for the Blackfoot was evidently not the man to go through such maneuvers for nothing.

Probably the two rangers had been observed as they made their way through the woods, and followed to their camp in the ravine, after which the spy—perhaps this brave himself, seeing that he was so eager to have the first blow—had made his way to where his comrades could be found, and led them to the scene of action.

There were others close by; the old trapper could hear the bushes rattling above him on the

other side of the ravine, and knew the warrior with the bow was not alone.

One great wave of excitement seemed to surge through his frame, and then he was as cool as ever before in his life.

The wolf-blood had leaped in rejoicing at the prospect of an immediate and severe conflict, but he had quieted it.

The redskin evidently thought that by virtue of his discovery he had a right to demolish one of the daring pale-faces, and it was no doubt fully arranged that when the death-cry of the stricken ranger burst upon the midnight air, the other Indians should throw themselves upon the remaining white, and either capture or make away with him.

Quite a neat little plan, indeed, but it was fated to fail at the very start.

Knowing that he, too, was in full view of the Indian, and perhaps, several others besides, Panddy gave up the idea of raising his gun.

He was an expert at firing off-hand, and could do just as much execution without giving them the slightest warning of his intentions.

Slowly the Indian raised his bow until it had been brought into the proper position; at the same time Panddy was elevating his gun by degrees until he was sure that it was bearing directly upon the painted devil behind the bush.

There was no time to lose.

When the Indian had gained his desired position he would give a quick, spasmodic jerk, and the arrow would be sent forward with force enough to drive it clear through a buffalo.

Authors speak of an Indian slowly drawing the arrow back to the head, holding it there for a few seconds, as if to aim, and then letting drive; but this is all sheer nonsense. No one ever saw an Indian brave send an arrow thus. They aim by guesswork, and gain a double amount of force by throwing the whole body forward with the shot; the whole work is done in an instant of time.

No man knew this better than Panddy, and, therefore, he got himself in readiness, so as to be able to defeat any such move on the part of the redskin.

Keenly he watched the fellow's every move, and when the final instant arrived, the old trapper's finger pressed the trigger of his rifle.

There followed the sharp, stunning report.

Close upon its heels came a horrible shriek of human anguish. The Indian's bow and arrow were thrown high up in the air, and as for the ill-fated brave himself, he made a spasmodic leap, and came thudding down into the ravine, tearing away the vines and bushes in his death plunge.

Old Panddy was on his feet in an instant, and although Blue Bill had been aroused from a deep sleep, he was not many seconds behind the veteran. He seemed to comprehend the whole matter in a flash, for the Indian yell put him into possession of the facts.

He rolled over several times almost in a twinkling, grasped his gun, leaped to his feet, and gained the side of his companion.

They had quite a hot time before them, but neither man thought of shirking the encounter even for an instant. For all they knew there might be fifty of the red fiends, but it was their desire to close with them first, and only retreat in case of overwhelming numbers.

Both men had immediately leaped from the moonlight into the dense shadow that lined the eastern side of the ravine. It was well they did so, for in another moment they would have been the targets for many savage marksmen.

As it was, upon turning around after gaining the shelter of the shade, Blue Bill saw three long arrows quivering in the ground at the very point where he had lain, and realized that he had not been an instant too soon in rolling away from the spot.

The two men crouched down and waited for what was sure to follow. Blue Bill had drawn his rifle up close to his shoulder, and was only watching for an opportunity to use it, while Panddy held a seven-shooter in his hand.

All this had taken place in a few seconds of time, and then came the result. There was a crackling of bushes and a dozen dusky forms came plunging into the ravine like so many wolves in search of quarry.

Blue Bill's rifle sounded the death knell of one brave, and old Panddy's revolver commenced its quick but terrible work.

Then the Blackfeet sprang madly upon them, and the fight became a hand-to-hand one, where each one strove with the power of a Hercules for supremacy, and where grim death hovered with his skeleton hand upraised to clutch all who might fall into his power.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS HUNTER.

The moon was shining from a clear sky, and a broad stretch of prairie land, illumined by her

silvery light, lay like a sea of glory, the gentle night wind now and then disturbing the grass, and making it undulate here and there like the billows of the ocean.

It was a glorious spectacle, and not a thing seemed to mar the serenity of the scene; but stay, from out the timber line dashed a horse, upon whose back sat a man dressed in buckskin.

In his hand this hunter grasped a long, deadly rifle; his face could not be seen, as the broad sombrero shaded it from view; but his long white hair streamed out behind him as he dashed madly along.

Occasionally he turned in the saddle and looked behind him as though pursued, and that this was the case was speedily made manifest.

When he had ridden about a hundred yards there burst out of the timber, with a series of shrill yells, a score of mounted Indians, who urged their horses with every conceivable method after the hunter.

The moonlight chase had evidently been already continued for quite a time, and the horse of the white-haired hunter must have been already fatigued when it began, for he showed many signs of weariness now, while the animals of the red men were for the most part fresh.

Away dashed the mad riders.

Turning in his saddle the white-haired hunter aimed his rifle. Probably the Indians already knew what execution he could do, for they seemed to fear him, as every warrior flattened himself out upon the back of his steed.

Crack!

The hunter knew a trick worth two of theirs, and as the report of his gun rang out, one of the mustangs received the fatal lead, plunged forward, and threw his unsuspecting rider fully twenty feet away. Whether injured by the shock or not, the brave was most effectually counted out from the struggle that was bound to take place.

Once more the Indians arose and urged their wiry steeds onward. Their gain was very evident, and one could almost decide upon the time it would take for the end of the race to come.

The mysterious hunter's horse fairly staggered, and yet with a determined nature, which only a man who has had such a noble animal can understand, he used every effort to keep up the race.

Finally a volley of shots broke from the pursuers, and the arrows and bullets hurtled around the mad rider. One, by accident, struck his horse's leg, and the animal came to a sudden halt, so that it was with difficulty the man kept himself from falling.

Understanding exactly what was the matter, the white man leaped to the ground. Hardly had he done so than his steed, with a piteous moan, plunged forward, and fell lifeless to the grass.

A savage shout rang out from the redskins when this fact became apparent, and they urged their horses forward as if anxious to reach the man at bay; but it was wonderful to note how quickly this determination was changed when the white-haired ranger raised his long rifle.

Every Indian sank behind his horse, and they seemed to wheel to the left, although the horses were still going forward at a mad pace.

"Dash my moccasins, if they 'ain't got the Comanche trick. Waal, that's wuth comin' so far north ter see, I swar. Whoever heard o' Blackfeet tryin' that dodge afore? They don't quite git the hang o' it; I reckon I could do better myself without practice. I'll let 'em understand that amateurs can't come that game on this chicken."

About this time there was formed a complete circle around the mysterious ranger, that continually moved in the same direction, and as the arrows and bullets began to cut the air around him, the white-haired hunter realized that unless he wished to fall a victim to a chance missile, he had better drop behind the body of his dead horse.

This he proceeded to do, and from his place of concealment watched the maneuvers of the enemy, showing more surprise and interest in regard to their strange actions than fear of the result, which proved beyond a doubt that the strange man cared not a cent for his life.

Gradually the living circle around him was contracting, and whoever had taught the Blackfeet this trick of their Texan brothers must have instructed them in all particulars, for they understood what was expected of them.

Sooner or later the end must come.

This would probably arrive when his rifle was empty, so that by firing it he could bring matters to a crisis. Deliberately singling out a certain one of his enemies who was foolhardy or ignorant enough to expose himself more than his fellows, the hunter threw up his rifle and took a quick aim.

The report came so speedily that one could almost imagine it to be a snap-shot. There was a terrific yell, and the brawny warrior, his foot

caught in a loop of rope that had been used for some purpose, was carried away at the heels of his mustang.

As the hunter had suspected, this was the signal for an assault. His rifle was now empty, and he would have no time to reload it, so he threw the weapon into a clump of tall grass, where the Indians would not be likely to find it, and at some future time he might expect to recover it.

True enough, the Indians turned their horses toward the center of the circle, and urged them madly forward. They no longer tried to conceal themselves behind their steeds, only bending low as they urged the animals forward.

What followed was one of the strangest scenes of border adventure on record.

Naturally, one of the Indians reached the point of action in advance of his fellows, and, drawing in his mustang, bent over to send an arrow through the form of the crouching trapper.

It was a fatal action for him.

As if charged with electricity, the form of the mysterious hunter sprang erect. As he did so his revolver was discharged, and the Indian, with a shrill howl, fell backward from his horse.

At the same time the old ranger shot upward and assumed the position vacated by the red-skin. Then, turning upon the astonished Blackfeet, he sent several bullets among them.

Almost before they could realize what had occurred, the valiant ranger was careering over the moonlit prairie once more, with a fair prospect of eluding his enemies.

They chanced to have their weapons ready, however, and immediately sent a storm of missiles after the fleeing man.

The effect was disastrous to him, for one of the arrows, sent by no mean hand, pierced the horse's leg, and soon made its presence known, for the animal began to run lame.

By this time the Indians were after him full tilt, whooping, yelling, and discharging every weapon they possessed at the daring pale-face, who had eluded them so boldly when everything seemed to point to his capture or death.

Still, he continued to keep ahead of them, but it was only by dint of much effort; for the wound which his horse had received was beginning to tell upon the animal, and it required every effort on the part of the hunter to keep up this pace.

He eagerly looked ahead, hoping to see something that would give him hope, but as far as the moonlight allowed him to see, nothing encouraging came within the scope of his vision.

In his right hand he still firmly grasped the revolver, his only weapon saving the knife that rested in his belt, and it was evident that should matters come to close quarters once more, he would use both of these to advantage.

Thus the mad race went on.

Unconsciously to both parties, it was converging toward a certain point where the white man would have a chance to show his strategic powers once more.

Upon the prairie, a couple of miles from the mountains, there rested a peculiar stone. How it came there learned savans had never guessed, nor the freak of nature that had split it in twain; yet there it was, with a passage through the middle wide enough for three horsemen to ride abreast.

When within thirty yards of this stone, the horse upon which the mysterious hunter was mounted suddenly gave out, and he only saved himself from sharing the fate of the unfortunate animal by a dexterous leap, when he felt his steed falling under him. Once more he was afoot upon the prairie, with his exultant foes dashing down upon him with furious yells.

The hunted man cast one swift glance around him, and then plunged into the grass, which close beside him grew to a height of several feet. When the Indians reached the spot they plunged into this grass plot, searching right and left for their would-be prey, but not a single sign of the hunter could they find.

Had he vanished in thin air?

Just then one of the Blackfeet spied the peculiar rock, and in a moment had communicated his suspicions to the rest. Away they went pell-mell toward the place, feeling confident that they would find their game there.

This fact was soon made evident, for a couple of shots sounded, and each was immediately followed by a death-cry from a brave.

Bending low upon the necks of their mustangs, the remainder of the vengeance party sped forward. Once they reached the rock and the intrepid hunter would stand no show whatever.

As they advanced they separated, so as to come upon the rock in several directions, and thus diminish the hunter's chances.

Three more shots sounded, and two of these proved fatal to as many steeds of the Blackfeet, thus dismounting a couple more.

No further opposition was made to the advance

of the Indians, who, a few seconds later, reached she rock. While half-a-dozen shot around it, others dismounted and boldly plunged into the opening.

To the extreme amazement of all, not a sign could they discover of the enemy. He had been here, that they were ready to swear, but in some mysterious manner he had eluded them.

Beyond the rock the grass was snort, and it seemed utterly impossible for any one to be concealed in it. Amazement rendered the Indians speechless, and those who guarded the rock sat upon their horses around it like so many statues.

One of these, hearing a noise above him, looked up just in time to see the form of the mysterious hunter, knife in hand, leap from the basin-shaped top of the rock, only half-a-dozen feet above the Indian's head, and land behind him on the mustang.

CHAPTER VII.

MONEY-MAKERS OF THE BORDER.

"BUFFLER's hoofs an' bar's claws! reckon thar n'aint nobody ter home hyar, seein' as I've rapped till my knuckles air sore, an' yet I kin swar thar's smoke a-comin' from thar chimbley. Tar an' feather me ef I know any other way than ter jest sail in an' make myself ter home. That's me, Roarin' Ralph Rockwood, ye bet!"

The old ranger had been standing in front of quite a commodious but ancient log cabin, situated far away up in the forests of Blackfoot land, and which had at one time evidently been occupied by a band of trappers, either on friendly terms with the redmen, or else possessed of an unusual spirit of bravado.

When he had rapped until he was tired without receiving any reply, the old reckless ranger made up his mind to enter, *volens volens*, so he lifted the latch, and stepped into the cabin.

He found a cheery fire burning on the hearth, but not a soul in sight. Evidences of occupancy could be seen in many directions, for the place had a cozy appearance just then. There was a quantity of cold food upon the table, and with a charming assurance, the old ranger sat down and "tackled" it, to use his own expression, taking out his huge Bowie to assist in the good work.

In the meantime his eyes were roving about, and he gazed in undisguised wonder at an elaborate, though small press of some sort, also the tools that could be seen around. Had he fallen upon the retired home of some old hermit, who intended passing the remainder of his life in solving some tremendous problem of evolution or perpetual motion?

The old ranger was not one to puzzle his head to any great extent over a problem, when a simple exercise of patience would develop the whole matter, so he remained seated in the rude chair, calmly devouring the lunch set out for some one who had not appeared to claim it.

This was old Ralph's way of doing things, and he generally came out of the horn with honor.

As he sat there he indulged in reflections.

"Tar my heels wid soap, but I can't guess w'at this ranch air. Wun would think that thar war a reglar treasury department in these hyar wilds, jedgin' by this."

As the old man spoke, he stretched out his hand and picked up a bundle of singular papers that rustled in his grasp. The light of the fire had revealed to him the fact that he held in his hand a package of bank-notes.

It was as easy as falling off a log to get at the truth now, for Roaring Ralph had heard that there was a band of counterfeiters somewhere in the great north-west, though he knew little of their working.

While he was inspecting the neatly done up package of bills, he gave a sudden start, and cocked his head on one side as though some suspicious noise had caught his ear.

Another moment and the ranger had jumped to his feet and grasped his rifle. Then, only pausing to listen once more, he bounded toward the ladder that led to the loft, his moccasined feet making no noise.

Reaching it, he ascended with the agility of an ape, notwithstanding the fact that he held his long rifle in one hand.

Once in the loft, he crouched down and glued his eye to a wide crack in the floor, which was speedily betrayed to him by the light of the fire below coming through.

The footsteps and voices he had heard were now at the very door, and immediately he knew this had been opened to give egress to the newcomers, whoever they might prove to be.

There were two of the men.

One stepped up to the fire and gave the logs a kick with the heel of his boot, which had the immediate effect of stirring up the blaze, so that

now the features of both men were rendered visible, especially as they took off their hats and threw them upon the table.

Roaring Ralph uttered a low cry.

One of the faces, at least, was very familiar to him, and yet he was greatly amazed that the owner should be found away up here in the far north-west, and seemingly the owner of this strange rancho.

"Yaller Bob, by the Eternal!" was the unuttered comment, as he looked down upon the two.

The individual whom last we saw wedged in between the sash and heavy window frame in the Deadwood gambling den, was seated below the old reckless trapper, and from his manner it was plain to read that he had a claim of some sort upon the rickety cabin in which they were.

The other man was a heavy fellow, with a bearded face and matted hair.

Roaring Ralph entertained a suspicion that he had seen him before, but just then could not place the rough-looking customer.

Yellow Bob eyed the victuals on the table a little suspiciously, as if wondering whether he had demolished such a quantity of them, and then invited the other to plunge in, which he lost no time in proceeding to do.

Soon they were engaged in conversation, and by listening intently, the man in the loft could hear every word that was spoken. Singularly enough, almost the first words he heard proved to be his own name.

"So you hate this Roaring Ralph?" inquired Yellow Bob.

"Like pizen."

"My sentiments exactly; I hev an old grudge against the critter which has been keeping warm these many days back. I hadn't any idea that you had run against the old critter."

"Waal—I hev. Thar's his mark."

As the man spoke he swept back the masses of coarse hair and revealed the fact that his ears were not where they should have been.

Some hand had sliced them off!

Ah! Roaring Ralph knew well enough now who this rough-looking customer was.

As if conjured up from the past, there arose before him, in imagination, a scene in a trapping camp some years before, when this man was caught in the act of robbing his traps, and in the presence of the whole brigade he sliced off his ears as a mark that would forever brand him a thief.

"Hist me inter a Pache's grave ef it ain't my old enemy, Black Donald. They allers told me that the critter would never furgit that job, an' it seems that they war korrekt," muttered the ranger.

Yellow Bob uttered a cry of horror when his eyes beheld the work of the old trapper.

"D'ye mean to say them's his ear-marks?"

"Jest what I mean."

"Then I reckon ye've got a stronger grudge agin him than me, and if the old reptile ever falls into our hands I'll take my revenge out in watching ye play the devil with him. I reckon thar ain't no torture that would be too keen for ye, Donald?"

The other gritted his teeth.

"I hev laid awake nights thinkin' what I would do to that critter when I faced him. Since the day when this yer happened—some years back, I hain't seen him onct, and when the time comes Roaring Ralph had best look out, for I'm a tiger from the jungle."

"How was it you let him escape before? I should have thought you'd have slain him on the spot."

"So I would if ther hedn't been nigh onter twenty o' his kimrades around us. The fact is, I war neatly caught skinnin' his traps. They kicked me outen ther camp, an' I daren't lay 'round in ther hope o' pickin' Roaring Ralph off, fur them men would a hunted me ter ther death."

"If I hev sworn once ter be the death of my enemy I hev a thousand times. I ain't in no hurry, fur I know ther time will come around all right, an' some day I'll find myself face ter face with the man I hate jest like ye hate a rattle-snake."

"Then you do not fear him?"

"Fear him? Not much!"

"But Roaring Ralph is no common man. Desperado as I am myself I should hate to be shut up in a dark cabin with him, and a knife placed in each of our hands."

"Waal, now ye've struck it. I confess such a thing wouldn't suit me very much, but if I could get Roaring Ralph in a place where my shooter would cover his heart, I reckon I wouldn't fear him very much," and the burly scoundrel broke out into a rough laugh, in which the other joined.

"There's a little difference in the position of affairs, I confess, and in such a case I wouldn't fear him much myself. Let us talk more of bus-

iness, my friend. The boys will be here to-night to carry off the last issue, a package of which lies on the table beside you. What, is it not there? Why, I would be willing to swear that I left it there. Ah, here it is upon the floor. When I heard your signal down at the double oaks I must have misplaced it in my hurry to meet you. This is our cozy den, where there is no more danger of disturbance from the authorities than from the man in the moon. The Indians, too, are friendly. They call me the money-chief, and I make their chiefs an occasional present, in good money of course, else our little game here might have been dropped on."

"True enough. By the way, old hoss, this hyar knife's a terrible weapon. Who carries sich a thing 'round these diggings? Bless me if I'd like ter hev it in my side. Thar's sich—thunder and lightnin'!"

Black Donald had carelessly lifted the huge Bowie for a closer inspection, and his eyes fell upon a name rudely carved upon the handle:

"Roaring Ralph Rockwood, you bet!"

No wonder the giant started back with a cry of mingled amazement and alarm, letting the huge knife fall from his nerveless fingers to the floor, in which it stuck and remained quivering from the violence of its descent.

"What is it?" cried Yellow Bob, astounded by this strange action on the part of his comrade.

"Look an' see. Blue blazes, but the critter must hev been hyar!" and Black Donald began to look nervously around him.

His companion was not a whit less excited when he had also read that inscription.

"Roaring Ralph has been here since I went out to answer your signal. I thought it seemed as though the meat had diminished wonderfully; then that package was on the floor instead of on the table. I hadn't noticed the knife you were using, or else my suspicions might have been aroused."

"Your deadly enemy is in this immediate vicinity, Black Donald. The opportunity you have waited for so long has come at last. Now, what do you intend to do about it?" asked Yellow Bob.

"Do?" yelled the latter; "bring me face to face with the critter, an' I'll show the tarnal snake!"

A human form dropped from an open trap in the floor above, and Black Donald saw standing before him his mortal foe.

"Dust my Sunday breeches!" cried Roaring Ralph; "hyar we air, Black Donald, an' one o' us stays hyar forever!"

CHAPTER VIII.

RECKLESS RUPERT.

A SMALL fire blazed in the heart of the forest, and bending over it was the same young girl whom we saw at the shooting match upon the border, and whom Colonel Leonard had called his daughter, Dolly.

To many upon the border she was now known under another name, and this was the musical one of Prairie Belle.

Even as she watched the frugal supper cooking, the bushes parted and a young fellow stepped into view. There could be no mistake about his identity; there was the same clear-cut face that bore a marvelous resemblance to the girl's, the same curly head and upright form we have seen once before, when he stood up before the assembled settlers and soldiers and won the prize which he had never received.

It was Silver Rifle.

There was a strange, sad expression upon his face that told of some heart trouble, which will be revealed as this story progresses. On the other hand, the young girl appeared to be all life and animation, as though it was her loving duty to cheer her companion.

"Watchman, how goes the night?" she asked, with a laugh, as the young sharpshooter reached her side.

"Coast seems to be all clear. Reckon we'll have supper now if it's ready," he replied, the cloud passing from his brow at the sound of her sweet voice.

"In a few minutes. Jus you get down here and replenish the fire, and all will soon be over. Keep in mind the fact that you have been starving the last two hours, and then, perhaps, our frugal repast will taste so much the better."

Silver Rifle laughed, as, laying down his rifle, he obeyed the commands of the little border queen.

His eyes followed her every movement, and it could be seen at a glance that his love for her was as deep-rooted as his life.

Presently she announced that supper was ready, and invited him to sit down, which he did. It is wonderful how the deft touch of a woman's hand will make the most doleful-looking desert bloom with brightness. Heaven be praised forgiving us

woman to cheer our otherwise lonely lot on earth. What with her neat little ways of managing, and her silvery laughter (which, though subdued, could not be wholly quenched by the danger of her situation), the meal passed off as nicely as though they had before them one of Delmonico's repasts instead of simple venison steak and coffee.

While they were thus engaged in eating, a human form was crawling through the forest in the direction of their little camp.

This silent crawler was no greasy, paint-be-daubed Blackfoot warrior, but a young hunter,

him, and then Silver Rifle, drawing her down to him, gently kissed her.

There was no demonstrative affection in the action, but it showed the deep love that bound these two together.

Reckless Rupert gave a groan that welled up from the heart as he saw this, for it seemed to seal his doom. Up to this time he had hoped that something might arise to befriend him, but in this kiss he read the destruction of his wishes.

He bowed his head upon the tree and gave way to bitter reflections. Why had fate been thus cruelly cold in cheating him of what she

"I am inclined to believe you," said Silver Rifle, lowering his weapon. "I have been upon the border long enough to distinguish the mock cries, when my attention is called to them, at least. What would you do, friend?"

"Do! First of all this fire must go out."

Suiting the action to the word the young hunter sprang upon the fire, kicking the embers right and left, and stamped upon them so savagely that one would imagine he had an especial spite against each individual one.

In the sixth part of a minute hardly a sign of the fire remained.



He pretended to become weaker with each passing second, and the Indian, seeing this, pressed him the harder, endeavoring to push him wholly under water and keep him there until he drowned.

clad in a new suit of buckskin that became him wonderfully.

Now and then he paused, and arising upon his knees, took in his surroundings. Through the sparse undergrowth the fire of the young fugitives shone like a beacon, and toward this star of hope he was dexterously making his way.

Finally, when he was near enough to see distinctly, he cautiously raised himself and glided behind a tree.

This act revealed his features and identity.

It was Reckless Rupert.

What was he doing in that far-away northern forest? The fact of his emotion at the sight of the young girl explained in part his mission, for he had felt his heart stirred at the sight of her as it had never been before by womankind.

From his place of espionage he could see the two by the fire distinctly. His eyes rested the longest upon the young girl; indeed, they seemed to be riveted there, as if she possessed a magnetic power over him. This was nothing singular, for he had loved the young girl these many months back, though it was a silent affection.

Finally, in glancing around, his eyes fell upon Silver Rifle, and a dark cloud passed over his face. Reckless Rupert was a handsome man, and, as his name signified, a daring one; still there was much that was good in his composition, and which would be brought to the surface at times when the occasion demanded it.

He looked on Silver Rifle as his rival, for there could be no mistaking the fact that these two loved each other. His eyes were glued upon them; he saw the young girl place her hand upon the head of the prairie shooter as if to cheer

was so prodigal with others? The realization was something that made him wince.

He was aroused from this state, not by any movement of the two by the camp-fire, for they were still sitting there, gazing into the coals. The sounds he heard came from the surrounding forest, and to the ear of an amateur would not have been anything unusual.

To Reckless Rupert, however, the case was extremely different. He had been a ranger upon the plains for many a year, and to him these wolf howls were very significant, inasmuch as he believed them to be counterfeit.

Eagerly he listened for a repetition of the suspicious sounds, nor were they long in coming.

There could now be no mistake; the Blackfeet were among the trees, having doubtless been attracted by the light of the camp-fire, and in a very short time it would be too late to warn the lovers.

Reckless Rupert lost no time.

Leaping forward, he reached the camp in a few great bounds. The young man heard him coming, and such was the rapidity of his actions that by the time Rupert had gained the side of the little fire he found the rifle of the other bearing upon his breast.

"What would you?" sternly demanded Silver Rifle, who had immediately recognized the other as his rival at the shooting-match, and was suspicious of his presence there.

"Hush!" cried Rupert, "you are surrounded by Indians. Listen, and you will hear their signals to each other among the trees. A few more minutes and any warning would have been too late."

"Now we must get out of this as speedily as possible. I do not doubt your knowledge of woodcraft, but as I have scouted in this part of the country before I know something of our whereabouts; so if you have no objections I will assume the position of guide."

"I accept your proposition with thanks, and believe you mean well. Before we move let me ask you one question, strange though it may appear to you. Are you aware of the presence of Colonel Harvey and his men anywhere in the vicinity?"

"I have not seen or heard a thing of the colonel since that day of the shooting-match," replied Reckless Rupert, wondering at the strangeness of the question put to him.

On that day, he had been so wrapped up in watching Dolly, that the words of the colonel to the effect that she was his daughter, and Silver Rifle one between whom and himself there existed a bitter feud, had been lost upon him, so that he could not conjecture now what under the Heavens the handsome young fellow feared the colonel for, or even wished to keep out of his way.

"You will swear this?"

"I solemnly swear it!"

"That is enough—we entrust ourselves to your guidance. I must apologize at a more fitting time for the suspicions I entertained concerning your presence here. Lead on, sir. Come, Dolly, give me your hand."

Reckless Rupert now found himself in a strange position.

Here was the girl whom he fairly worshiped, and either her lover or husband, he knew not which, but at any rate the man who stood between

him and that which his soul longed to possess. Naturally, he should have hated Silver Rifle bitterly; but to his surprise, he found that he entertained a feeling of respect and friendship for the young sharp-shooter.

These two he was trying to lead to a place of safety, while the signals of the Blackfeet were ringing through the forest.

Reckless Rupert was a man well-versed in prairie lore, and yet he was not the very best one in all the world to take friends out of such a trap, for as a general thing, his methods were of too desperate a nature.

Very often it is just such means that succeed the best; but under circumstances like the present, the better and safer plan would have been a more cautious one. From his heart he meant all for the best, and if his plans did fail, it was not because he failed to do his very utmost.

As they walked noiselessly along, it became evident to even the young girl herself that the Indians were growing as thick as bees around a basswood in full blossom, for their signals sounded almost from every quarter. They had seen the fire extinguished, and realizing that those who had built it must be aware of their presence, did not hesitate to signal each other in an open manner.

"Be prepared for the worst," whispered Rupert, "for the pesky critters are as thick as skeeters in a swamp. Once we are discovered, and all hope of escape is well-nigh gone; but we can die like brave men, defending the young lady here. Hist!"

Close beside them there was a rustling of the bushes, and at the words of the young trapper himself and friends sank down to the ground.

Another instant and there was a sharp, ringing cry that echoed through the forest, and then the figure of a painted Indian bounded from the bushes. It was still light enough for them to see him, and like a flash Silver Rifle discharged his weapon.

Of course the Blackfoot went plunging into the bushes, a dead man, for the prairie sharpshooter never missed his aim; but before they could run a dozen paces, it seemed as if every tree gave up an Indian brave, and the two young hunters found themselves in the midst of a howling mass of painted devils, against whom they could make no more impression than on a solid rock.

CHAPTER IX.

HILT TO HILT.

PANDY ELLIS and Blue Bill certainly had their hands full. There had been fully a dozen of the Blackfeet in the beginning—at least that many leaped like mad panthers into the ravine.

The revolver of old Pandey had diminished their numbers by several, and when Blue Bill emptied his rifle a death-cry announced that another of the redskins had gone to his eternal rest.

Nevertheless there were still enough of the Indians left to give them some trouble; but neither of them could complain, as they had both been complaining of inertia only a short time before, and here the opportunity was given them to let their wolf-blood have a show.

The Indians must have realized that they had fallen upon some desperate characters, for they fought like tigers.

Pandy was in his element.

These redskins had not murdered his chum, but they gave him a splendid opportunity to give vent to his fury, and he improved upon it in a manner that was simply marvelous.

Dropping his useless revolver, Pandey drew his long bowie. At about the same instant a tall brave leaped at him with the bound of a panther, but he found that he had caught a Tartar, for one of the ranger's hands instantly encircled his throat, and the terrible blade sought his heart.

Casting the man from him as he would a stick of wood, old Pandey, the king of the wild border, sprang into the midst of the yellow foes. The gleam of his knife could be seen in the moonlight, but it was soon engaged in hot work.

He fought like a Hercules, and there was not one who could stand up before him. Like a raging lion he tore through the ranks of the Blackfeet, and then turned back on them again.

Meanwhile Blue Bill was not idle.

When he had emptied his rifle he clubbed the weapon and sprang into the melee, dealing blows right and left. Blue Bill, when aroused, was a perfect whirlwind, and between the two they bade fair to clean out the whole crowd. Indeed, half of the redskins were already *hors de combat*, and by the way Pandey was sawing away with his huge knife there would be another corpse inside of ten seconds.

It was at this interesting moment that one of the heathens, who had succeeded in getting a

position back of the dashing ranger, made an agile leap and landed upon his back.

Blue Bill turned instantly, but of course, as the fellow's arms were clasped tightly around him, his gun, as a weapon, was entirely useless.

Dropping it, he squirmed around until he could get his arms loose, and then seized the fellow in a hug almost equal to that of a grizzly bear.

Both of them were unusually strong men, and the contest for supremacy seemed about nip and tuck for quite a time. Bill could not throw his antagonist, nor could the Blackfoot master him.

In their wild struggles they left the other combatants, and went reeling down toward the river bank, which, as is already known to the reader, was only a short space from where the trappers had pitched their camp, for Pandey and Bill had seen the specter canoe upon the water without hardly moving from the spot where they had laid down.

Unmindful of this fact, the two combatants, engaged in such a desperate struggle, went whirling down the ravine, and finally drew up on the very bank of the river.

Here the contest continued for quite a little time longer, until finally, in endeavoring to perform some cunning trick, that would place the white hunter at his mercy, the earth gave way under the feet of the redskin, and he plunged down into the cold water of the river.

In falling, however, he maintained his fierce hold upon Blue Bill, and as the handsome ranger had no means at hand for sustaining the shock, he was compelled to follow the redskin.

Thus it was that the two mortal foes found themselves in the cold water.

The fall had not been over ten feet, but both of them went under with a splash, and upon their reappearance the fight commenced in earnest.

Neither of them had as yet been granted an opportunity to draw a weapon, though in the belt of each there rested a keen knife.

Once in the water and it became the fierce endeavor of both foes to duck each other under, and thus end the contest.

Blue Bill quickly realized that by an artifice he might deceive the Indian and gain an advantage that would give him the ultimate victory.

He pretended to become weaker with each passing second, and the Indian, seeing this, pressed him the harder, endeavoring to push him wholly under water and keep him there until he drowned.

Blue Bill pretended to allow this; still it required both of the Indian's hands to keep him there, while with one of his own he quickly drew his Bowie. One sudden upward sweep and the keen blade had accomplished the business. A shrill yell sounded, the ranger threw the struggling form of his foe off and saw him vanish down the river. Then, holding his knife between his teeth, Blue Bill clambered up the bank, holding on to the roots and vines.

The top was reached at last, when, upon looking up, he saw a shadowy figure above him.

CHAPTER X.

THE DUEL IN THE CABIN.

THE scene in the old cabin was exceedingly dramatic, to say the least.

Roaring Ralph had discovered an old trap in the attic floor, and the thought had occurred to him that it would be a splendid idea to open this and drop down before the two men who were telling each other how much cause they had to hate him, and what terrible things they would do in case of ever running across him.

The idea was just such a one as to suit the reckless old ranger.

He had been upon the prairies the better part of his life—indeed, ever since a boy, and every now and then was likely to get upon the rampage, when he generally tore things with a high hand.

Tickled over the thought of giving the two men a neat surprise, the ranger was carefully laying the trap back when he saw the little drama occur in reference to the knife.

Now was the most fitting time to betray his presence, in order to carry out the eternal fitness of things, so down went the old ranger in the manner described before, landing in front of Yellow Bob and the other.

As for the chief of the money-makers, he expressed surprise, but no fear. The grudge between Roaring Ralph and himself was of a very desperate nature, and besides, the fellow was cunning enough to put the whole matter upon the shoulders of his companion.

As for Black Donald, he recognized the old gray-haired ranger as the man who cut off his ears in the trapper camp years before, and in spite of himself a shudder ran through his frame.

Roaring Ralph himself was the first to break

the silence. His fall from above, although light in itself, had still been enough to set the rickety floor to vibrating, and it was evident there was a cavity below, and that the timbers that held the floor were unusually far gone.

"Sculps an' sassengers! hyar we air, beloved, an' twar a sweet scene ter gaze upon. Thy bootiful phiz, Black Donald, air enough ter make a man satisfied wid life; ye hev called me, an' I'm hyar. Now, what would ye? I kin see ther fight in yer black eyes. How well you'd like to slice off my ears, so that yer own would stop itchin'. Here's yer chance, then. Lollypops an' lobsters! Yaller Bob, will ye act as referee in this jewel?"

"With pleasure," responded the polite counterfeiter, for this was just what pleased him.

"Then, Black Donald, draw yer weapon. We'll hev it out right hyar, chaw me up fur an alligator if we won't, now," saying which, Roaring Ralph drew his long Bowie from where it had stuck up in the floor, deposited his rifle in a corner, and then once more faced the earless man.

Black Donald was not one-tenth so eager for a fight as appearances had made him seem a few minutes before. In his heart he feared the old ranger like grim death, as was evidenced by the fact of his keeping clear of him these years that had passed since his ears were made to pay the penalty of his thievery; although, during this time, he had continually boasted of the terrible revenge he intended to take when fortune should bring him face to face with the old ranger again.

Now, however, the alternative was forced upon him to either fight or show himself a coward, and besides, he had reason enough to hate this man, so there was nothing left for him but to plunge in.

Here the old ranger stood, knife in hand, and ready for the fray. Yellow Bob, for some reason of his own, dropped all personalities for the present, and resting himself upon the table, declared that he would act as umpire, and decide in favor of the one who came out first best.

Black Donald drew his knife.

The action was not near so fierce as one would naturally expect, after hearing his vows of vengeance upon the man who now faced him. Still his knife came out of its sheath, and after that there was no retreat for him.

He had no reason to fear, for all his life he had been noted as a swordsman, and could handle the Bowie with the best of them. Unless, then, his alarm had detracted from his usual skill, he might expect to come out of the fight, victor.

There was one thing that made him uneasy. He knew the reputation of the old ranger, and that when once he was aroused, he was apt to prove a perfect hurricane, whose equal could scarce be found upon the border.

If the matter had been left to him he would never have fought, but the presence of Yellow Bob made it a case of necessity now.

Thus it is pride often forces us to that which wisdom and prudence would never permit, and so Black Donald found it.

"Bullets an' bayonets! hyar's at ye, ole hoss, an' ef yer come outen ther scrimmage wid ary a nose left ter ye, then it won't be ther fault o' this critter, Roaring Ralph Rockwood, you bet. Whoop!"

There was a clash of steel, and then the two men had met in the encounter from which it seemed one of them would probably never come out alive. Of the two the old ranger was certainly the most active, and resembling a panther in his movements, he was apt to do most of the aggressive work. If Black Donald could defend himself from the assaults made upon him he would be doing well enough.

Roaring Ralph had no especial cause for hating this black-featured man, beyond his usual feeling toward the class of desperadoes to which the other belonged, but he knew that Donald sought his life, and would not hesitate to put a bullet in his back should the occasion occur; so that he was determined to give the fellow another lesson, and make it interesting for Yellow Bob, who sat upon the table near the middle of the room, highly delighted with the stirring scene.

Black Donald was no novice.

He had seen some stirring times in his own life, and, as has been said before, knew how to wield his blade quite well; but then he was really no match for the old ranger in agility, and that commodity counts a great deal in a hand-to-hand fight.

The two men, after crossing blades, devoted themselves to the game in hand, and yet Roaring Ralph did not neglect to keep an eye on Yellow Bob, for he half fancied that worthy would be endeavoring to put his oar in, should the tide of battle set against his friend in a very strong manner.

The ranger was ready to draw his revolver in a twinkling should this occur, and would have probably made it lively for both of them.

It was his policy, however, to let on as though

at times he was getting the worst of the fight, and retreat before the furious onslaught of Donald, who, completely deceived, would plunge recklessly forward in anticipation of a speedy victory, flushed with the thought that he was bearing the other back, until suddenly the old ranger would assume the offensive again, and rain such a shower of blows upon the earless man that it was all he could do to ward them off.

Roaring Ralph was magnanimous.

Several times he could have dealt a blow that would have told upon the contest, but he re-

yawning gulf shot table, Yellow Bob, the earless man, and our Roaring Ralph, down—to what?

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEATH LODGE.

VAIN was the struggle of Reckless Rupert and the young prairie sharpshooter, for it seemed as though there was an Indian for every tree in the forest; and what could two men do against such a host?

They fought like heroes, long and well, and if

cast upon the whites when this fact was ascertained. It would not be well for them to retaliate.

Besides the dead, there were fully a dozen of the Blackfeet who possessed wounds of some sort, more or less severe, which went to show the good use our two friends had made of their time and weapons.

The young girl was treated well.

Evidently Howling Wolf had seen her before, for his black eyes lighted up as they fell upon her lovely face, and he gave some orders in his own tongue which Reckless Rupert construed to



THE MARKED MOCCASIN.—Wolf Trailer bounded to his feet, and, knife in hand, would have finished his dastardly work, but that the chief covered him with a rifle and sternly bade him keep his distance.

frained from doing so. Perhaps this was partly due to diplomacy, for he did not think much of Yellow Bob's honesty and sterling qualities, and felt sure the scoundrel would just as soon send a bullet through his (Roaring Ralph's) head, in case he saw the fight going against Donald, as he would wink should a fly alight on his nose.

While he fought, the old ranger became imbued with an idea. He noted the dilapidated condition of the table upon which the self-appointed umpire sat, and concluded that it would be an easy thing to bring him into the affair.

The floor during this time was shaking violently with the efforts of the two men, and threatening to give way with every movement.

Roaring Ralph, suddenly assuming the offensive, drove the other rapidly backward toward the table. Meanwhile the umpire was indulging in personalities.

"Good for you, Donald; chase him. There, look out! A fine blow, old buckskin. Tables are turned now. Go it, Roaring Ralph. Whoopee! why do ye run, buzzard? Thar, he's after ye like hot cakes. Oh, this is what I call fun; it's just glorious sport for the boy in the fable, but death to the frogs, which—hi there, have a care or—good heavens, lookout, or—"

Bang came Black Donald against the table, which went over like a shot, the earless man following; and such was Roaring Ralph's momentum that he could not stop himself, and so accompanied them.

This was too much.

The rotten floor gave way, and through the

they did not cover the ground with their slain foes as did Bozarris and his Greeks of old, they at least made quite a good impression upon the Blackfeet.

Several times Reckless Rupert saw a chance, which, by taking advantage of, he might have gotten clear, but somehow he could not bring himself to do this.

The thought did not occur to him then as afterward, that by remaining free he could have done his friends more good than as a fellow captive. All he looked at was his desire to be near Dolly, and share the fate of her he loved so madly and yet so hopelessly.

So long as there was a chance of resistance, the hunter would not submit; but when he saw Silver Rifle held fast in the arms of several stalwart braves, he knew that it was useless to struggle longer.

Forcing his way to the chief of the party, whom he knew very well, he suddenly threw his gun at the redskin's feet, and raised his hands in token of submission. Having thus placed himself under the protection of the chief, it would have been as much as any warrior's life was worth to have made even an effort to slay him.

"Howling Wolf, I give in. Your braves are like the leaves of the forest, and it is useless trying to stand out against them. I am your prisoner."

The chief muttered a few words, and immediately all signs of hostility ceased, though two men held each of the hunters after disarming them. An inspection of the field showed that three braves had met their fate, and dark looks were

be commands as to the good treatment of the white squaw.

This pleased the ranger, and yet deep down in his heart he realized the truth, and had a dim suspicion that this courtesy on the part of Howling Wolf foreboded evil to the whole of them in the future.

The Indians camped in the ravine until morning, and then after making something of a meal, the march for the village was commenced.

During the night Rupert had determined upon his plan of action, and this entailed his accompanying the Indians, for he had resolved to remain with them so long as they held the young girl in their power.

Reckless Rupert was capable of great powers either for good or bad, although his life up to this time had never given occasion for them to be brought to the surface. Now, however, he had firmly resolved that if by the sacrifice of his own life he could help the girl whom he loved, there would be no hesitation on his part.

The Indians wondered at the cheerfulness with which he walked along. If Silver Rifle or the young girl suspected the truth they gave no sign of it.

Several times Rupert caught the eyes of the girl fastened upon him, and he flushed at the thought that he detected in them something more than mere sympathy; but the idea of her feeling any interest in him when her lover walked at her side was absurd, and the young ranger chided himself for allowing it to remain in his brain an instant.

The tramp was a dreary one, for the Blackfeet had no horses.

In the middle of the afternoon, however, they were joined by a party of half a dozen braves with horses. This was part of the band with whom the unknown hunter fought. Five of the braves were desperately wounded, and the sixth was taking them home, while the rest of the band continued their hunt.

Up to the last account, however, it may be said that the mysterious hunter had not yet been captured or slain.

This meeting was fortunate in one respect—it gave Dolly a horse to ride, for at a command from the chief, an able warrior leaped from his seat and took his place among the other braves, while the young girl was helped upon the back of the steed, although she needed but little assistance.

When night came they were so near the Blackfoot village, that it was decided not to delay but press straight forward, as the men could stand it, and Dolly was now mounted.

So the march was resumed after a halt of a few minutes to eat a morsel and quaff the clear water of a brooklet.

The scenery was perfectly grand when the moon arose and peered through interstices in the trees; it seemed like a glimpse of fairyland; around them the soil was fertile, and the trees grew to an immense height, so that it had no resemblance to the groves of scrubby trees generally found in the northwest.

Howling Wolf took great pleasure in telling the captives that they were now near his home, though he did not say what their fate was to be. It was easy to see from the gleam of his eyes what he had in store for Reckless Rupert and the young prairie sharpshooter. Strange to say, neither of them appeared to be affected in the least.

Rupert was conscious of his own power to escape when the occasion arose for such a move, and had, as we already know, fully decided to meet the fate of his friends if he could not rescue them.

As for Silver Rifle, he knew a trick that would very likely save his life, even though he had been the means of helping several of the Blackfeet warriors from off this mortal coil.

The moon was, perhaps, two hours high when the night winds bore to their ears the distant but distinct barking of a dog.

This sound seemed to please the Indians exceedingly, for they talked among themselves, breaking their moody silence.

In less than ten minutes the chief gave utterance to a long, loud whoop, of singular intonation, that echoed strangely through the still night. It was answered by loud cries from the village, and then there ensued a perfect pandemonium of howls from both sides, and finally the lodges were reached.

The captives were marched to a central square, where the two men were placed on exhibition, but Howling Wolf immediately gave Dolly into the keeping of an antiquated squaw, with whom she vanished into a neighboring lodge, sending one backward glance at the two whites that made the blood leap madly through the veins of Reckless Rupert.

An exclamation aroused him.

Turning, he looked into a pair of mad eyes, and found himself face to face with a herculean brave, between whom and himself there had long existed a most terrible feud. The dusky fiend ignored his bound condition, and would have sprung at his throat like a panther, but a sudden and well-directed kick from Rupert stretched him out upon the ground.

He bounded to his feet, and, knife in hand, would have finished the dastardly work, but that the chief covered him with a rifle, and sternly bade him keep his distance. This order Wolf Trailer obeyed, but there was a terrible flash in his black eyes that told Rupert the time for a settlement would come some day.

The exhibition was now concluded, and the two captives thrust into a stout cabin near by.

It was the Death Lodge.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PANTHER'S LAIR.

THERE are certainly times in life when the human feelings become so outraged that a vent must be found for the pent-up emotions, lest one burst. Some men think to relieve themselves by swearing, others in the use of favorite exclamations, while very few maintain a discreet silence.

Blue Bill belonged to this last class.

When anything out of the way occurred, he was apt to relapse into a state of dumbness; but this was no sign that he was not just as equal to the

emergency as any other man who devoted his time and wind to expressing his surprise and disgust.

After his severe tussle with the Indian in the water, it was annoying, to use no stronger term, to find another enemy above his head when he reached the top of the bank.

The first thought that flashed through his mind was that he had better drop back into the stream; but perhaps it was just as well he did not attempt this, for there were rocks below him, as he had climbed the bank in a different place from his descent, and a fall upon them would have been anything but pleasant.

The indistinct form of his enemy stooped over him as if to wield either the tomahawk or scalping-knife, and Blue Bill prepared for a tremendous spring in order to grasp the throat of his dimly seen foe, when suddenly there fell upon his ears a voice.

"Jehosophat! Blue Bill, I kim near takin' yer h'ar thet time, an' a bootful sculp 'twould hev been to hang on my lodge pole. Come up, ole hoss, in a jiffy now."

His expected foe was old Pandey Ellis.

Blue Bill could not but give a sigh of relief, for a fight with a brawny Blackfoot warrior under the circumstances would not have been very agreeable.

Old Pandey assisted him to gain a footing, and then a hurried survey of the late battle-field was taken, which revealed the fact that with one or two exceptions their foes had been annihilated.

Both men had suffered in a degree from several wounds, but none of them were serious, and they had reason for congratulation. The victory had been an amazing one, for they had been outnumbered at least five to one, and that they had come out of the conflict ahead was only due to the fact of their being powerful fighters.

There was now nothing left for them to do but leave the sanguinary ravine with all possible speed, which they did, both of them securing some little relic to remind them of the fight, which had certainly been one of the finest in which either of them had ever engaged.

Those who had escaped Pandey's terrible knife, and fled, would bring the news to the Blackfoot village, and they might expect to find half a hundred warriors on their trail before twenty-four hours had elapsed.

Accordingly they left the ravine and began to follow the course of the river, intending to secrete themselves somewhere until morning came, when they would seek the trail of the Marked Moccasin and follow through forest and stream, over prairie and mountain, until their prey was run to earth.

They heard no further signs of the red men, though several of them were groaning when the two friends left the ravine.

After proceeding for several hundred yards old Pandey came to a halt and motioned Blue Bill to do the same. What he had seen or heard the latter knew not, but he had implicit faith in Pandey, and sank to the ground without the least hesitation.

The moon forced an ingress through the branches of the trees and illumined different patches of of the moss-covered ground.

A human figure was stealing along not over thirty yards from them, and when he came into one of these moonlit places they both caught their breath and remained transfixed.

Once before that night had they seen that specter figure, and both men felt themselves shaking as they gazed upon it. Pandey, who had knelt upon the grave of his pard, felt it the worst, but neither of them could stir an inch until the image had vanished from the spot.

Then Pandey arose.

"We hev seen it agin, Billy, twice in one night. I wonder wot it does mean. Thar must a-been a deal of treachery in ther matter o' Billy's death if he can't lie easy in his grave; agin I renew my vow ter foller that critter ter the end o' ther world but what I'll find him—ye hyar me, Billy?"

"That I do, old man; and in me you will have a comrade in your trail. I never felt as queer as I do now, for this is the first time I've ever looked upon a man that was dead and buried."

"It air a quar circumstance, but do 'ee know it kinder gives me heart? Thar war my pard as plain as daylight, and it did my ole eyes good ter see him, even if he war a disemboweled spirit, as ther feller sez."

They continued their tramp, and in a short time arrived at a place where they concluded to remain until daybreak.

There was no chance of their being pursued by that time, so that unless some one accidentally stumbled upon their retreat, their presence would not be known to the Indians.

The place where it was now determined to rest was nothing more nor less than a great tree. One side of it seemed perfect, but upon the other a

keen eye would trace an opening under some vines.

The trunk of the tree was hollow.

As they came along the trail in the evening, the two men had noticed this place, and even peeped into the hollow portion, saying something in regard to what a nice place it would make to rest, never dreaming, however, that they would be forced to return to it before the night was over.

Blue Bill stepped up to the tree in advance of Pandey, and parting the vines, vanished from view in the interior of the giant.

As he did so, the ears of Pandey Ellis were saluted with a low growl that seemed to electrify him.

"Look out, Billy; thar's a painter inside," he cried, with sudden emphasis.

Blue Bill had by this time found it out for himself. No sooner had he stepped inside the tree than he became conscious of the fact that a pair of glaring eyes were fixed upon him, and mechanically he had pulled back the hammer of his rifle without a second's delay, at the same time raising the weapon a trifle so as to bring it on a line with the fiery orbs, as near as he could judge by intuition.

When that growl saluted his ears, he understood immediately that he had invaded the den of that forest monarch, the panther, who had chanced to be out when they called before.

Blue Bill was now in anything but an enviable position. He could not retreat because the panther would not give him time, and knowing that at any instant the beast might spring, he dared not take a step backward.

To fire was running much risk, for there was not one chance in twenty of his reaching the creature's brain, and if he failed to do so he knew the consequence.

It would never do to remain idle, however, and he realized this in a flash.

The roar of his gun sounded immediately after, and just as soon as the weapon was discharged he dropped upon his hands and knees, letting the gun fall at the same time.

His hand was at his belt and on his bowie in a trice, and as the blade came from its sheath, he heard a scrambling close by him as the panther struck. Blue Bill turned, knife in hand, to receive him, nor was the attack delayed a second.

Man and beast went over on the ground, sometimes one underneath, sometimes the other. All the time both were at work, Blue Bill plunging his terrible blade into the side of the beast, and the panther chewing the hat of the ranger.

Bill had, very fortunately for himself, clutched the throat of the panther with his left hand, and such was the power of his arm that he succeeded in keeping the brute's teeth away from his throat, though by some chance the panther managed to lay hold of his hat, which was demolished pretty well.

Old Pandey, outside the tree, was in a fever of suspense all this while, for though he had full confidence in the ability of his friend, he knew what it was to be caged with a wounded panther, for he would rather have been shut up in a room with three men, all of whom sought his life.

He stood there with his rifle held in readiness to receive the panther should it make its appearance, and yet fearing to see it, as he knew full well what this would portend.

The sounds that came to his ears from the interior of the tree were conflicting, but he could distinguish the worrying growl of the panther, the quick percussion of blows, and the scrambling of both parties.

But for the fact that his keen ear could trace pain in the panther's notes, he would have felt even more worried than he was.

Gradually the noise became less violent, and he knew that the contest was drawing to a close, with what result he could not even guess.

At length complete silence fell upon the interior of the tree. Pandey's worst fears were aroused, for all at once it struck him that both of the combatants had been killed.

It would not have been the first time such a thing had occurred within his recollection, and he cared more for Blue Bill than he could have expressed in words.

They had known each other since Bill, as a young fellow, joined Pandey's brigade in the far northwest, and many a time had they slept under the same blanket. Now that Bolly Wherrit was rubbed out, the old veteran prairie ranger realized more than ever what he thought of Blue Bill, and it would be a terrible blow to him if the latter was rubbed out.

Therefore his hand shook a trifle with emotion, as, cautiously advancing his long rifle, he carefully parted the vines in the endeavor to have the moonlight enter the cavity.

Ha! a moving object caught his eye; one of the combatants was still alive and about to issue forth. Man or beast, he knew not which, for the

moving object was stretched out more like the panther than a human being.

Pandy covered it with his rifle, and once this was done there was no hope for the panther, should it prove to be such.

"Speak out, or by ther leapin' catamount I'll splinter yer thighbone. Ef it air ye, Blue Bill, then Heaven be praised; if ther painter, then ye hed better hev skipped yer den this night, fur hyar ye die!"

"Hold hard, old comrade; Blue Bill it is, and right side up with care. Here, help me haul the critter into the moonlight; there's something queer about the animal, I don't know what, exactly. Tar and feather me, Pandy Ellis, get down on your knees and look here!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ROARING RALPH'S MATINEE.

IF excitement was what Roaring Ralph wanted, he certainly had enough of it.

Few men would have wished to pass through such scenes more than once, and yet it was well known that the old ranger gloried in them.

Yellow Bob had sat upon the table, evidently taking an infinite amount of delight in seeing his enemy engaged with some one else, for he could enjoy the affair without being in any danger himself, which was the best part of it all.

When, however, the catastrophe occurred, the outlaw did not find his position as enviable as he could have wished.

The shock must have been tremendous, for the three men, together with the rickety table, went tumbling to the floor, and unable to stand the shock after all that had previously occurred this gave way and allowed the whole caboodle to go through.

Very naturally, Roaring Ralph was the last to go through the gaping hole in the floor.

This could be accounted for by two reasons, the first of which was that he had been in the rear, as the motive power of the whole catastrophe, and also the last to fall.

Then again, as he went down, his hand caught upon the edge of the broken flooring, and, although this gave way almost immediately, still it delayed his progress a trifle.

Roaring Ralph had a dim idea of seeing lights and human forms as he shot through space, and then he struck upon the ground.

Again fortune favored him, for Yellow Bob chanced to be directly beneath him, and thus became the recipient of almost the whole collision.

As for Black Donald, he was so unlucky as to fall upon his back, with the table covering all his form but feet and head. He had not lost his senses from the shock, as was evidenced by the fact that he remained in this recumbent position during the exciting little scene that ensued.

Roaring Ralph sprang to his feet like an acrobat, and threw a quick, astonished gaze around him. The sight he saw was enough to make a look of surprise come upon his face.

He had fallen into the money-makers' den.

Around him were half a dozen brawny men who had been engaged in some occupation before the arrival of the three, together with the table, through the floor. They had sprung erect, and were gazing upon the strange sight in dismay.

Up leaped Yellow Bob.

All the humor had left him now; in fact, it seemed as though the heavy fall, with the rough landing to it, had completely demoralized him, and instead of feeling funny, he was in a bad way.

With a string of oaths he turned upon his men, and yelled to the cool ranger.

"See that reptile! It's Roaring Ralph, and to the man that lays hands on him first I will present a thousand dollars in good gold."

The bait was tempting.

Perhaps there was not one of the men but who had some knowledge of the old Colorado ranger: either through hearsay or personally, but it did not seem to amount to enough, as might have been expected, or else the offer of the money was too good for them to stand.

At any rate, they sprang forward to obey the command. This was the signal for Roaring Ralph to begin his work. He had his revolver in his hand, and this was now pointed at the first man who came.

"Tomahawks an' tomahawks! Keep clear of me or ye car ter live! Back—back!"

They came to a pause at his shouts, but it was only for a moment, and the next instant, urged on by the words of their mad leader, they rushed upon the ranger.

At first this was a confusion, for Roaring Ralph was not used to being assailed by so many men at once. He had fought his way through many a crowd, but never so close and so sudden.

Vicious thrusts were made for his heart, but the weapons only wounded some of the hands that wielded them, or else clashed together in unison.

Before the men could recover, the crack of the ranger's revolver sounded, and one of them went plunging into a heap of unfinished bank-notes that must have represented about half a million dollars.

Then Roaring Ralph uttered his shrill war-cry, with which he was accustomed to strike terror to the hearts of his foes, and descended upon the body of money-makers like a hawk falls upon a flock of doves, though the comparison in this case would hardly bear a close investigation, as the money-makers did not seem so very much like gentle pigeons.

They scattered at his onslaught as a drove of pigs would when a dog suddenly makes a plunge among them. Thus the ranger was enabled to reach the ladder that led to the upper floor. There was a trap above, which was probably open to the touch.

As Roaring Ralph hung upon the ladder the men seemed to recover their senses, and sprang at him like so many crazy wolves.

He kicked right and left, and sent a couple of bullets down that found lodging in the arms of as many men, but the gang had been fully aroused, and nothing short of annihilation could have kept the counterfeiters quiet now.

Had they succeeded in dragging Roaring Ralph back into the cellar, and given him a chance to draw his formidable Bowie, I doubt if a single member of the border league would have come out of that death hole alive; for when the Colorado ranger became fully aroused, he was equal to a dozen common men.

Once more Roaring Ralph sprang up the ladder.

This time he reached the trap, when one of the money-makers leaping high, caught his foot, and held on with a tenacity worthy of a better cause. There was only one way out of it for the ranger. With the strength of a giant, he pulled himself up, and as the fellow held on with a grip tenacious as death itself, he very naturally came up with the prairie man.

When Roaring Ralph gained the floor, he coolly sat down, and once more drawing his revolver, aimed at the head of the incumbrance.

"Bar's claws an' bufler hoofs! now, critter, unless ye wanter hev daylight bored through ye, jest drop!"

The man was either too stubborn to obey, or else relied on his comrades for help, for he did not obey the command. As the revolver sounded, he uttered a shriek and fell back into the cellar, minus one of his ears, which the rough ranger had purposely shot away, as though determined to mark all of the gang in something the same manner as he had done Black Donald years before.

He was on his feet in an instant and ready for business.

One of the desperadoes had managed in some way to gain a hold on the edge of the broken flooring, and when Roaring Ralph arose to his feet, this worthy was already half way up.

The old ranger sprang at him like a whirlwind. As he saw the threatened danger, the man attempted to pull himself all the way up, and such was his fear of the result, that he actually managed to do so.

About this time something struck him.

Whether it was the old ranger's moccasined foot, clinched hand, or the butt of his rifle, he never knew, but at any rate he went whirling down to the cellar of the old cabin as if a thunderbolt had struck him; and ever afterward, this man held it as his private opinion that the rough Colorado ranger was in some way connected with the Old Nick, and that to tackle one was to invite a conflict with the other.

Roaring Ralph lost no time.

Springing to the open trap, he seized hold of the ladder, and by an exertion of his great strength, threw both it and the man who was ascending, over in a confused heap.

Then, slapping down the trap, he arose to his feet, laughed heartily, and seizing his rifle from the corner where it had remained all this while, was about to unbar the door, when he heard voices outside.

At first he was half inclined to ignore them, but when they grew louder, he realized that there were quite a number of the money-makers, who were evidently determined to get him.

Thinking that the only way to escape was to make a dash for it, he sprang to the door, and with a shout, threw it open. He was met by a crowd of men, who were all armed with rifles and pistols, and who were all looking at him with expressions of surprise and interest.

cool as any cucumber that ever grow in the shade of a cornstalk.

CHAPTER XIV.

SINGING SWAN.

NEITHER Reckless Rupert nor the prairie sharp-shooter had ever been cooped up in a Blackfoot Death Lodge before, but they knew what it meant, all the same.

There was no hope for them, in the opinion of the Indians, who had already condemned them to death. Strange to say, however, the two men seemed in no wise concerned. They appeared as cheerful as if no danger hovered over them.

This can be easily accounted for.

With Rupert it did not lie in his constitution to be despondent. At all times he was ready for the deadliest danger, into which he usually plunged with such an utter disregard for life, that he had become noted as a reckless man, who cared but little what accident befell him so that some excitement fell to his share.

Then again he felt sure that he could escape if it came to the final moment, for he had a way of slipping the tightest bonds, and concealed about his person was a weapon that would probably do him good service under such circumstances.

As to the other, Silver Rifle was also sure of obtaining his freedom, for he intended giving the redskins an exhibition of his rifle shooting that would cause them to look upon him as a magician, and as a result he would be invited to remain in the village and become one of them.

Thus the night passed away.

What little the two prisoners had to say was upon any other topic than Dolly, for instinctively they both seemed to avoid that.

Morning came at last.

A breakfast was brought to them upon platters of bark, consisting of venison and succotash, to which they did justice, as may readily be believed. While they were eating, Silver Rifle looked up and found himself the cynosure of a pair of black eyes, the owner of which had entered the lodge after the guard had withdrawn, but so silently that neither of them had been aware of her presence until the prairie sharpshooter thus accidentally discovered it.

Their visitor was an Indian maiden, and it was plain to be seen that she was the daughter of a chief from her dress. She was very pretty, and her form one that, for contour, Venus might have envied. As her garments were gayly decorated with wampum, and colored beads and quills, as were also her leggings and tiny moccasins, she presented quite a beautiful picture.

Her black hair was long, reaching almost to the ground, and was plaited more after the fashion of the Sioux than Blackfeet, while upon her head a diadem of precious stones, fastened upon yellow buckskin, gave her the regal air of a princess.

As Silver Rifle saw her gazing so fixedly at him, a thought flashed into his mind that was almost an inspiration.

This untutored child of the forest had taken it into her head to fall in love with him. He could see it in her every action, and beaming from her bright eyes. Might she not be of some assistance, then, in carrying out his plans?

To his surprise the Indian girl spoke, and in such good English as to amaze both himself and Reckless Rupert, who now looked up.

"Silver Rifle has come to the Blackfoot town. Many moons ago, Singing Swan saw him in a dream, and knew he would come some day. She is glad to see him, and she is glad to see you, too."

It was a good thing that she spoke so freely, for it was the first time that she had ever spoken to a white man, and it was the first time that she had ever spoken to a man who was not a Blackfoot.

"Just like it," muttered the elder ranger, as he looked at the girl. "It is a good thing that she speaks so freely, for it is the first time that she has ever spoken to a white man, and it is the first time that she has ever spoken to a man who is not a Blackfoot."

At any rate, the girl was a good thing, for she was a Blackfoot, and she was a girl who was not a Blackfoot. She was a girl who was not a Blackfoot, and she was a girl who was not a Blackfoot. She was a girl who was not a Blackfoot, and she was a girl who was not a Blackfoot.

She was a girl who was not a Blackfoot, and she was a girl who was not a Blackfoot. She was a girl who was not a Blackfoot, and she was a girl who was not a Blackfoot. She was a girl who was not a Blackfoot, and she was a girl who was not a Blackfoot.

guess, and it was only when he had climbed up to a crack in the log-wall and looked out that he saw what it meant.

The bonds of the prisoners had been cut when they were thrust into the Death Lodge so that Rupert did not have much trouble in scrambling up to the small hole through which the daylight was coming.

At first it seemed as though the young prairie sharpshooter was about to be made to run the gauntlet, for from all quarters the Blackfeet were gathered into a crowd.

Among some of the chiefs stood Silver Rifle, and in his hands was his favorite weapon. It was evident that they were about to witness some specimens of his skill.

Whether this came from their previous knowledge of the prairie sharpshooter, or through the citation of the red princess, could not be told, but there is nothing that will excite more interest among the redmen than skill in some branch of a warrior's duty, such as riding, shooting with gun or bow, or else knife and tomahawk throwing, unless it is tricks of legerdemain, which always amaze the heathen.

Soon the performance was about to begin.

Silver Rifle went through the old tricks of bringing down a hawk, splitting a bullet by shooting at a knife thrust into a tree, striking a penny thrown up into the air. Then came more difficult work.

Dolly made her appearance, and placed a small bird upon her head, as on a previous occasion. Reckless Rupert shut his eyes and gritted his teeth until he heard the report, and then saw that the young girl was unharmed.

The Indians were wonder-struck at the marksmanship of the young sharpshooter, but even more wonderful things were to come. Silver Rifle was shooting now with a greater object in view than he had ever had before, for the prize was life or death.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WHITE WIZARD.

A GOURD was now placed upon a short stick, fifty paces away. The Indians could not understand what was about to be done with this, and, therefore, kept their eyes wide open.

Silver Rifle spoke a few words to a chief near him, and then handed the man his rifle, with the

request that he should aim at the gourd. The chief, who was a young man, did not

to invite a corresponding display on their part. Silver Rifle suddenly sprang forward and threw himself upon the ground, as if about to turn a somersault. He did not go all the way over, however, but remained with his feet in mid-air, where his hands should have been.

Then, after balancing shortly, he stood upon his head, with his arms free.

According to instructions, the chief now pointed the beautiful rifle in his hands, and, to the amazement of all the beholders, the young prairie sharpshooter proceeded to aim the weapon while thus standing upon his head.

There was something so singular in the sight that even Reckless Rupert, peering out through the crack in the prison lodge, held his breath in wonder.

But what did the spectators expect to see? They were all looking at the rifle, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

A crowd of people gathered around the sharpshooter, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

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He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

Dolly had disappeared again, and as Reckless Rupert saw Silver Rifle walking composedly about, side by side with Singing Swan, he uttered something very like an oath, and leaped down from his post of observation.

Silver Rifle was treacherous in his nature, so the young hunter concluded. Not content with the love of such a peerless creature as Dolly, whose affection beamed from her very eyes, he must needs take advantage of the simplicity of this forest princess, and for some object deluded her into believing that he was free to love her.

"He's a mean, cowardly skunk, and I can whip the man who would do such a thing. What's his honor? To think of that dear girl being dropped, even for such a beauty as the red princess. It makes my blood fairly boil."

"Perhaps he has an idea of getting us all away, and is playing his cards to that end, but I don't care, it's all the same; for the time being he's deluding one girl, and playing traitor to the other."

Reckless Rupert was himself in no enviable position. The Blackfeet had good cause to hate him like poison, and there was no chance of his gaining his freedom in anything like the manner the prairie sharpshooter had done.

Still, Reckless Rupert did not feel in the least alarmed.

His hands were free, and he was possessed of a knife, the existence of which was entirely unknown to his enemies. If it came to the worst, he could make quite an impression upon the Indians with this weapon. In the meantime, he was not the man to be idle.

During the hours of his captivity he had been struck with the idea that one would have thought should have come to him in the start; and when he realized that as a free man he would be of more value to the young girl than as a captive, his resolution was taken to effect his escape that night.

Through the livelong day he heard sounds from without that seemed to tell him continually that the combined vengeance of the whole tribe was destined to fall upon his head.

The Indian squaws were lamenting their dead.

He could hear their weird crooning, together with the occasional wild chants, and it could not be expected to elevate his spirits very much, especially when the fact was clearly understood that he was the object of their furious bursts of rage.

Night fell at last.

The hours passed slowly to Rupert, who had fully determined that when midnight had arrived he would attempt to tunnel out of the strong lodge.

Gradually the noise became less powerful, and at length, judging from the position of the moon as seen through the chink in the wall, he understood that the eventful time for him to begin work had arrived.

Throwing himself upon the hard, pounded ground, he was about to begin operations, when his ear detected a peculiar, scratching noise. Instantly he was on his feet, and all attention.

In a few minutes he was able to decide that it came from the room, and a short time later he made up his mind that the noise emanated from a keen knife in the hands of a powerful man.

Some one was cutting a road in to him.

Doubtless it was Silver Rifle, who had commenced his work. By effecting the escape of Reckless Rupert, probably he hoped that Dolly could also be carried off, and the end for which he worked be achieved. Satisfied with this idea, he waited patiently.

After a time he could see the bright sky through the hole, which grew rapidly under the keen knife of the unknown. Still there was no sound from the guards.

At length the hole was large enough to admit of the passage of a human body. Then the midnight worker bent his head and peered in. The moonlight fell upon the face. It was a painted one—the face of his sworn foe, the Blackfoot brave who sought his life with the pertinacity of a fiend from Hades—Wolf Trailer.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROARING RALPH IN A TRAP.

When the moon had set, and the night of the escape was over, the young man, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

Exclamations arose on all sides when they saw the gaping hole in the floor, and the thought might have entered some of their minds that lightning had struck the house, but for the fact of a man's head making its appearance through the trap.

It was Yellow Bob himself.

Hearing the well-known voices of some of his men above, the leader had thought it safe to ascend the ladder and see what had become of his reckless foe.

Presently his comrades made their appearance, and explanations were in order. The amazement of the new-comers, when they heard that one man had committed all this havoc, and that this person was no other than Roaring Ralph Rockwood, was intense.

Where had the reckless ranger gone?

This was an interesting question, and one that required some reflection before answering. Yellow Bob at length announced it as his opinion that the enemy must have left the lodge.

In support of this theory he introduced the evidence of himself and Black Daniel to the effect that he had most certainly barred the door after they had entered, and yet the new-comers had found it open to their touch upon their arrival!

This was Roaring Ralph's scheme, you know, and it bade fair to prove successful.

Among the new-comers there chanced to be a doubting Thomas, however, who always suspected that some one was trying to outwit him. His plan—and a very good one it was, even though it occasionally got him into trouble—was to put himself in the other person's place, and see what he would be likely to do under the circumstances.

The keen eyes of this man were not long in falling upon the ladder that led to the upper floor, and immediately he began to speculate.

Once before the ranger had sought refuge in the loft, why not a second time?

Without waiting to analyze the scheme, the man picked up a small trap-door that had been brought up from below by some of the new-comers, and began ascending the ladder.

Roaring Ralph could see very well what was coming, and knew that as soon as the man's head came above the floor, he would be discovered.

The man became more cautious in his movements, but finally first the lamp and then his head appeared in sight. Seeing nothing at first, he became bolder, and raised himself another round. Just then he saw the crouching form of the trapper, with the rifle bearing directly at him.

What to do the man knew not. He seemed to be paralyzed for the time being, for it looked as though his fate was staring him in the face.

These below had watched his progress with some curiosity, and when they saw him start there as if frozen into a statue, they could not understand it at all. The man saw a sheet of flame leap out from the long rifle that was pointed at him, and thought the bullet must have struck his heart, when in reality it was quite a different mark at which Roaring Ralph had aimed.

The lamp was smashed into a thousand pieces, and darkness came upon the scene. The man the fellow picked up a small trap-door that had been brought up from below by some of the new-comers, and began ascending the ladder.

Then weapons were fixed, and the hunters went tearing through the rotten floor of the loft: but if the money-makers hoped that they had slain their enemy, these hopes were dissipated by a tramping sound that came from the upper floor.

The men were furious, and oaths were made that Roaring Ralph Rockwood should never leave that lodge alive. He had entered the lion's den, and now must suffer the consequence.

After some vain attempts to reach him, the counterfeilers gave up the endeavor. The ranger heard him hard at work as if removing their machinery, and wondered what under the sun they were about.

He had discovered a trap that led to the roof of the cabin, and upon looking out, saw that it was still as dark as Erebus.

By and by, he knew that nearly all of the men had left the house. Were they about to allow him a chance to come forth? Hardly. These men did not entertain such humane feelings toward him; they would have taken much more delight in seeing him torn to pieces by wolves, or burned to death.

Ah! what was that?

The old ranger began snuffing the air with avidity, as he gave that start, and it did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

He was a young man, and the chief, who was a young man, did not

It was indeed true.

The money-makers had contemplated a removal to another home base for some time, and the action had been forced upon them now by the demolition of their cabin at the hands of the ranger. It was decided, however, that he should never be allowed to boast of his exploit.

They had him cooped up in the loft, and there he should remain until his fate overtook him.

Immediate steps were taken toward removal, and with such a force of men to work as was on hand, it did not take long to clear the cabin of all they wished to save.

Then dry grass and leaves were thrown into the lower room, and after his men had formed a complete circle around the house, Yellow Bob concluded that the time had come for the completion of his plans.

A match was struck.

Upon this being applied to the pile of tinder, a bright flame flashed immediately into existence, and the doom of the cabin was sealed.

"Good-bye, old thunderbolt of the Colorado canyon!" shouted the money chief, as he sprang from the door of the cabin and rejoined his men.

Old Ralph had been listening to the movements of the men below for some time, but for the life of him he could not guess what they were doing.

Thoughts of his mission to the northwest flashed through his mind, and he wondered if he would find Silver Rifle in time to warn him that his enemy, the colonel, was, with a company of picked soldiers, searching for him, though ostensibly their mission was to scout among the Blackfeet, and see if they were ready to make a treaty with the whites.

From this fit of abstraction the old ranger was aroused by the noise of his enemy, Yellow Bob. The meaning of the outlaw's words was not yet plain to him, though he was on the eve of a discovery.

Then it was, as before stated, that his olfactory organs caught the pungent odor of burning leaves, and the whole truth flashed in upon him.

The situation was anything but pleasant to any man. Roaring Ralph, after venting his feelings in a tirade against the "tarnal critters," closed the hole above the ladder, and then faced the terrible dilemma.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PAIR OF GLEAMING EYES.

BLUE BILL had not been seriously injured in his conflict with the panther, and when he uttered those strong words, after pulling the defunct animal out into the moonlight, old Pandey quickly sought his side.

The dashing ranger had never been in a more desperate situation than that from which he had just emerged, but the kind will of Providence seemed to watch over him, and he had come out without a scratch excepting where in one place the teeth of the creature had torn the skin from his arm, and this he looked upon in the light of nothing.

What there was strange about the animal, old Pandey failed to see at first, but upon Bill's pointing it out to him, he marvel, to his amazement, that the panther had a leather collar on.

"That was a mighty big help to me, I can tell you, old man, in keeping the animal's head away from my throat. I realized that that war something of the kind on him; but, as you may well know, I had no time to look into the matter. What's your opinion, comrade?"

"Well, there ain't much for say in regard to that, for there are two plans. That panther has been in captivity. I reckon some hunter or redskin had him in their possession for a time and he's escaped. I've had such pets myself at times, and they ain't ter be relied on, yet I've known more that war more treacherous by far. Wat air it, Billy?"

While Pandey was talking, Blue Bill had removed the collar from the neck of the defunct panther, and the operation was easily done, as it was only secured by a stout buckle.

He held it in the moonlight, and vainly endeavored to make out some words that had been painted upon the leather collar; but the paint was not strong enough, or else the leather was too hard, for the job was finally given up.

"I reckon it war a hunter, for no red would have seen a furey thing at the neck of his pet. The furey has been in the forest some little time, and I stand ready to swear that he war caught by a snare and not by a hunter's hand. Blue Bill, you talk, which is saying a good deal. We'll look the thing over when we have daylight."

So saying, the ranger returned to the cabin, and his men were certainly glad.

but when daylight came he had more weighty matters upon his mind, and the affair was forgotten.

Gathering several armful of leaves, the two men placed them inside the hollow tree, and then crawled in themselves. They were but human, and needed rest as well as the next man. Their work of the day had wearied them considerably, and as their sleep had been twice disturbed, it was but natural that they should feel tired out, especially when the fact is taken into consideration that they had fought and defeated a band of Blackfeet, greatly outnumbering them.

Their couches were soft, and the gentle god of slumber, Morpheus, anxious to be wooed; so that before many minutes had passed by, both of the rangers had sunk into a refreshing sleep.

There they lay with hands resting upon the ever faithful rifles, and yet sleeping as softly as two children; for although both of these men had gone through many startling adventures during their life in the woods and on the prairie, not a single deed had they done to cast a blot upon their names, and when a man's conscience is white, his slumber must of necessity be sound unless ill health has a strong hold upon him.

How long they slept they never knew, at least for quite a time to come.

Blue Bill chanced to be lying nearest the opening, and when he opened his eyes it was with the dim consciousness that something cold had touched him.

It might have been a dream, where he was again in imagination fighting hand to hand with the strange panther, or could it be that the mate of the defunct brute was about entering the tree?

The thought was enough to send a cold shiver through his frame.

He opened his eyes again, for the first time he had seen nothing. The moon was still shining, but must have gained the western sky, for the rays did not enter the cavity, though from where he lay he could see without by a slight turn of his head.

The sight that met his gaze was enough to freeze the blood in the veins of any man but the most daring. Outlined against the heavens was the head of an Indian. He could see the face, black hair, and feathers that arose above the ebony locks.

The eyes of the red man glowed like sparks of phosphorescent light, and it was evident that he was glaring around the cavity for signs of those whose presence he suspected.

As has been remarked before, the moonlight did not penetrate the tree, so that it was not as much illumined at this hour as when Blue Bill had crawled in to meet the strange panther in his lair.

Without doubt one with such keen eyes as the redskin was supposed to possess, could penetrate the semi-darkness with some effect, and it would be but natural to suppose that he had ere this detected the two forms of the recumbent rangers, though they might have been but dimly seen by him.

It had been the hand of the Indian groping about inside the cavity upon his first arrival, that had aroused Blue Bill.

How the Blackfoot had found them he was utterly at a loss to say.

Perhaps it had been mere chance in his coming there. Then, again, there was a probability that he had heard the fight with the panther, watched their retirement into the hollow tree, and after waiting a reasonable time for them to give way to slumber, crept up, either to murder them in their sleep, or to verify his belief before starting for help.

There was also a third possibility.

The Indians who had escaped their bowies in the ravine might have found assistance in a short time, and returned to the scene of their disaster. Most persons would think it impossible to trail in the night, when the trees overhead prevented the moon's rays from reaching the ground in fifty places where it did accomplish this feat once, but Blue Bill was too old a campaigner to be thus high minded.

Many a time had he traced furs and bones by torchlight, and had he found out for certain that the Blackfoot had accompanied the war party, he would not have hesitated to venture upon the path he would have followed that night, and would have surely found the two men in the light of a morning.

All these things flashed through the mind of Blue Bill in a much less space of time than it takes now to write or read them.

His hand had intuitively strayed to his rifle, and rested upon the shaft of his weapon, as he sought to realize that a stranger was within.

He now saw that the two rangers of the red man were hidden by a tree, and that the

the cold hand moving up his body towards his throat.

It was evidently the intention of the warrior to throttle him. In order to accomplish this, he was obliged to bend forward, so that his head was close to that of the ranger, who could even feel his hot breath upon his cheek.

To Blue Bill it made very little difference whether there was one Indian or fifty against whom he had to contend. He saw that but one course lay open to him, and did not hesitate about following it out, never caring what might follow.

Even as the Indian would-be assassin bent forward to accomplish his work, a hand that had a grip like that of a vise, suddenly clutched him by the throat, and with an alarming abruptness the redskin was jerked into the hollow tree.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE TREE TOPS.

THERE never lived on the face of this whole broad earth, a more daring man than Blue Bill.

He was always foremost in the fight, reckless as to consequences, and brave to a fault. Where innocence was to be protected he would face a score of desperadoes without flinching, and there was not a living man who could point to his past life with a clearer conscience than Blue Bill.

When he pulled that redskin into the hollow tree, he had not the remotest idea but what there were twenty of his comrades just without, waiting for their turn to investigate; but it made such a small difference to him, that even had he been positive on this point he never would have hesitated.

The redskin was no slouch in the line of strength, and though the sudden assault of the ranger had discountenanced him, it was only for the time being.

His good sense told him that he was in deadly danger, and he was on the alert to save himself from whatever fate was overshadowing him.

Blue Bill had drawn his knife, but he did not have an immediate chance to use it, for he had drawn the Indian toward him with more force than he had intended, so that he actually fell upon him.

By this time the Indian had become alarmed as to his situation, and was beginning to struggle like a panther, despite the terrible grip upon his throat.

Exerting his muscular force, Blue Bill turned the redskin over, and at it they went hammer and tongs. Old Pandey leaped to his feet like a flash at the first sign of trouble, and, as he could not tell whether his comrade was engaged with man, beast or devil, he contented himself with holding his rifle in readiness and watching for an opening.

His valiance was soon rewarded.

A hand appeared at the opening, unmistakably that of an Indian. Pandey hesitated a few seconds whether to punch the fellow with the barrel of his gun or give him the contents, deciding to do the latter, as it was not easy to reach over the two struggling forms.

As the report of the rifle sounded there was a howl from without and the head vanished. A terrific floundering could be heard as the unfortunate brave threshed about among the bushes, but Pandey was not listening to that. He had drawn his revolver, and waited for another target.

The affair now became extremely interesting, for while Blue Bill was wrestling with his foe, Pandey was aiming away with his revolver, as quite a goodly company of the redskins had made their appearance outside.

Blue Bill was surprised to find such a tough customer in the redskin, for it was seldom he met his match.

The fellow must have possessed arms of steel, for he fought valiantly. In spite of all he could do, the ranger could not subdue him, though both of them were panting for breath.

All at once, however, the fierce grip of the heathen relaxed. Bill heard a half groan, but knew that no effort of his had been so effective in causing the Blackfoot to give up the ghost.

A few seconds of the truth entered his mind, and he saw that the fellow was not very much surprised to find himself in such a position, and that he had ended his days.

Blue Bill was glad in his heart that he did not have the death of the brave on his hands, for he was a valiant man.

The situation was not very pleasant for the ranger, who was now in a most awkward position, and he was beginning to feel that he was in a bad way. He was now in a most awkward position, and he was beginning to feel that he was in a bad way. He was now in a most awkward position, and he was beginning to feel that he was in a bad way.

armed with keen weapons, while it seemed perfectly proper for him to believe that the white man was defenseless except so far as his arms went, and he was willing to risk them.

Darkness surrounded them, save for the faint show of moonlight that managed to find an ingress through a hole in the roof, but as they were locked in each other's embrace, there was no need of any light on the subject.

Reckless Rupert was a man of extraordinary strength, though it was only upon certain desperate occasions that he showed this, as it seemed to him that it was taking an unfair advantage of a common enemy.

In this case, however, it was quite different. The redskin was a powerful man, and he had come to murder his pale-face foe, for, looking at it in the proper light, it was nothing more than murder for Wolf Trailer to creep into the strong lodge and assault a man whom he felt sure was unarmed.

The Indian had himself mistaken the strength of his opponent, for though bitter enemies, they had never, up to this time, been pitted against each other in a hand-to-hand encounter.

Wolf Trailer was not long in discovering that he had made a terrible mistake, both in regard to the strength of the white man and also his being unarmed.

The fact of his being held as if in the jaws of a vise informed him as to the first, while the painful wound inflicted by the hunter's knife made him aware of the second clause.

By this time it began to dimly enter the mind of the redskin that he had overstepped the bounds of prudence in thus venturing into the strong cabin to kill a defenseless prisoner, and that the sooner he got himself out the better it would be for his health.

Just there, however, the difficulty arose.

The Indian was positive.

The white man was equally determined.

One exerted every fiber of his being to break away, while the other maintained his savage grip, and prevented him from budging.

By this time Wolf Trailer was seriously alarmed for his safety, and forgetting all bravery and dignity, would have cried out, only that this was rendered impossible by the fact that Rupert's left hand clutched his throat, and try as he would, not the faintest articulation could he make.

Then the idea seemed to strike him that he was ready to pay the white man back in his own coin, as he possessed two stout arms, and in one of his hands was clenched a knife.

The thought, had it not been so tardy, might have developed some chance for the unfortunate redskin, but the time for that had already gone with him. Somehow or other the choking off of his wind supply seemed to disable him about as badly as a dose of poison would have done, for upon endeavoring to raise his hands, he discovered that the effort was too much for him.

A feeling of numb horror took possession of the doomed Blackfoot, when he realized the awful predicament in which his rashness had placed him. Having conducted his expedition in secrecy, he could hope for no succor from friends, and must, therefore, submit to the inevitable, and meet his fate.

Nor was it long in coming.

There was a sudden rushing blow, a deep thud, and the blade of the white Hercules had cleft the Indian's black heart in twain.

Wolf Trailer broke loose from the clasp that held him, and involuntarily gave vent to a sobbing death shriek, that rang out with startling distinctness on the night air, after which he fell to the beaten earth floor of the cabin, dead.

Immediately voices were heard outside, the guttural tones of Indians, beyond doubt, and even as the white hunter clambered like an ape up the side of the strong cabin, the door below swung open.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WILD CHASE.

AFTER leaving him for such a length of time, because events still more important claimed our attention, we must now return to the mysterious man who was left in such a desperate situation.

He had quickly discovered that one of the points into which the huge rock was divided was shaped in the top, and that it would make a good hiding-place he had not the least doubt. Of course it could only be temporary, for the cunning Indians would eventually discover him; but his plan just then was to look out for the present, and trust to his good fortune for a means of making his ultimate escape.

In carrying out this plan, he clambered up the rock, and concealed himself in its highest top just as his pursuers came rushing up, and surrounded the queer rock.

As has been said before, the passage formed by the split in the rock was wide enough for a horseman to enter; and when men had been posted at both ends to prevent the escape of the paleface who had given them so much trouble, one of the Blackfeet urged his steed into the crevice, and with eyes on the alert pushed forward, followed closely by a second and a third savage warrior.

As they rode along, the tips of their feathers were just visible from the top of the rock. The mysterious hunter watched them closely from his place of espionage.

Presently an idea that had been forming in his mind took shape, and he lost no time in putting it into action.

Raising his head above the edge of the rock, he saw one of the Blackfeet, who had been left to do the duty of sentry, seated on his mustang. Suddenly, with the bound of a tiger, the hunter had leaped from the rock—landing upon the mustang just in front of the Indian.

The animal, amazed at this sudden addition to his load, darted away like a meteor—a circumstance that suited the hunter exactly, and one which he felt called upon to assist by every means in his power, by thumping the animal's sides, and striking him on the neck with his gun, using the stock of it.

By the time they had gone fifty yards the astonished redskin had partly recovered from the half stupor that seemed to come upon him when the hunter made his leap.

This he evidenced by his actions.

A pair of dusky arms glided around the form of the mysterious hunter, and, as these suddenly closed upon him, he found himself made the object of a peculiar embrace which was about as disagreeable as it was strange.

Such was the disadvantage under which the mysterious hunter labored, that even had he chosen to resist he would have been almost powerless in the hands of the redskin, because his back was toward the dusky aborigine.

Strange to say, however, he made not the least attempt at self-defense in the way of struggling. He knew something better, and lost but little time in proving this to the complete satisfaction of all parties concerned in the matter.

His rifle lay in an advantageous position, for he could feel its muzzle pressing against the chest of the redskin as he bent forward.

All that was necessary therefore was to pull back the hammer and let her drive. While they were being carried at full tilt across the open prairie by the alarmed mustang, he managed to get his hand upon the trigger of the gun.

There was a half-muffled report, and then a cry of intense agony broke from the lips of the dusky rider, so close to the ears of the mysterious hunter that he could not but start.

The sinewy arms relaxed their hold, and so far as the redskin was concerned, the white man had nothing more to fear; for when the report of the rifle sounded, the mustang, still further alarmed, gave another leap forward, which action resulted in throwing the sorely wounded Indian from his seat.

It was easy to tell that he had gone without turning to look, for the heavy thud upon the ground was distinctly audible, and besides, the animal seemed to leap forward with renewed energy.

A half-muffled yell from the rear proclaimed that all of this little tragedy had been witnessed by the redskin's comrades, and the heavy pounding of hoofs upon the prairie announced that they were in hot pursuit.

For this the hunter cared next to nothing.

Although he had a decided faculty of outwitting the redskins, and seemed to take much pleasure in doing it, yet it was quite patent that the strange unknown had a reckless disregard for his life, which was shown in various ways.

His actions, therefore, had been more the result of habit than a deep and earnest desire to save himself from death, such as most men in his circumstances would have experienced.

The horse he was now mounted upon, although not the first he had ever seen by a long shot, was, nevertheless, quite a good animal when compared with those of his pursuers.

By glancing over his shoulder as he rode along, he could see the shadowy forms of his enemies strung out in an irregular line, each man urging his steed forward in every way he could.

His course was toward the heavy woods of the hills, where he would not have much difficulty in leaving his dusky foes in the lurch.

On over the prairie they sped.

There was a sadness about the mysterious hunter that showed his confidence, and one could easily tell that he had no fears as to the result of the wild chase.

Gradually he was leaving the Indians behind, and had he kept straight on over the open land,

in time he would undoubtedly have lost them, had no accident occurred.

It was his pleasure, however, to get among the trees, nor was he very long in reaching the point he had been aiming for. Quickly turning his steed to the left, he plunged into the growth, and was from that time lost to the sight of the Blackfeet, who might as well have searched in a haystack for a needle, as for the veteran hunter who had eluded them among the timber.

Here we will leave the mysterious ranger, feeling sure that this is not the last to be seen of him.

CHAPTER XXII.

BURNED OUT.

ROARING RALPH's situation was anything but pleasant. He had entered the lodge of the money-makers, secreted himself in the loft, overheard the conversation of Yellow Bob, the money chief, and Black Donald, had suddenly made his appearance when the conversation had become warm concerning him, by dropping through an old trap in the middle of the floor; had engaged his old-time enemy, Donald, in mortal combat, and when the weak floor gave way, the three had been precipitated through the ragged opening among the counterfeiters below.

Then there had ensued quite a lively time, Roaring Ralph finally escaping to the room above, and managing to keep his enemies down. Hearing the sounds of another squad outside, he hastened to the loft again, where he had been discovered by one of the money-makers with a lamp, and come very near doing the same kind service for the man by a shot.

Later on he had made the discovery that the money-makers had removed their traps from the old cabin and surrounded it to prevent his escape, and then set fire to a heap of brush that had been thrown into the lower story, which was just the place where last we saw the reckless old Colorado ranger.

After closing the trap, upon discovering that the smoke coming up from below was caused by the malignity of his enemies, Roaring Ralph gave himself the limited space of a moment for serious reflection.

It was needless to deny that he was in a severe scrape, and everything seemed to point to the fact that it might possibly have a fatal termination; even the reckless ranger of the great Colorado canyon was forced to admit that.

He had been in many a scrape, however, where the odds seemed equally overwhelming, and yet, just when the monster, Death, stretched out his grisly hand to clutch his long-looked-for prey, something had turned up to save him from such a fate.

He never knew from whence his rescue was to come—that was one of the mysteries of his life; but every time the opportunity was sure to present itself.

Upon the present occasion Roaring Ralph did not lose much time in useless cogitation.

He knew well enough that Heaven helps those who help themselves, and that the sooner he began prying around, the quicker he would find out the means of escape that would be offered to him.

There was no sound from below that would indicate the presence of his foes, but he knew them too well to imagine that they would leave any opportunity for him to escape so long as they were able to know of it.

Now and then the crackling of flames came to his ear, which sound informed him that they had seized upon the woodwork of the cabin, and in a few more minutes would undoubtedly make their appearance through the floor.

Before such a thing occurred it behooved him to stir his stumps and discover some means of yet outwitting his ferocious foes.

If there was only a trap leading to the roof he might yet save himself, but how was he to find out?

Even while he conjectured, a slim flame darted through an aperture in the floor, flashed upward like an evil tongue and then vanished, to be repeated again, undoubtedly, shortly.

By this means he would be enabled to see what lay above him.

When the slender tongue of flame again made its appearance, Ralph was ready, with his head thrown back, to note the condition of the roof, and an exclamation of intense satisfaction escaped from his lips as his eyes fell upon the very thing for which he was looking.

Yes, sure enough, the fates seemed to have conspired to furnish the reckless ranger out of his predicament by offering a chance of escape.

With out the loss of a second he sprang across the floor, and was at the trap.

His ready fingers quickly detected that it was

- His eyes flashed fire and his
rifle with the force of anger.

his thoughts had taken another flight and were bent upon the man who had brought this great and irreparable loss upon him, the wretched murderer of his pard whom they had tracked so long and faithfully, and were sworn to follow to the death.

Blue Bill watched him in silence, for he could realize just what emotions were in the heart of the old ranger.

When Sam Wheritt fled to the regions of the far northwest he had an object in view.

True, the murder of his brother had filled him with horror, but as they had never been together much there was very little affection between them, so that Sam's emotion was more of fear for the consequences than sorrow at his drunken deed.

He knew how famous Bolly was, and that the man who killed him, no matter who he might be, would have a score of rangers on his trail, foremost among whom would be the most noted of all Indian fighters—Pandy Ellis.

The very mention of that name would always excite a commotion among a crowd of border ruffians, some turning pale, while others grew red in the face and cursed, and it was little wonder that Sam Wheritt became dreadfully alarmed for his personal safety.

He fled far away into the trackless wilderness, but there had followed on his heels, guided by that fatal Marked Moccasin, two trailers whom nothing but death could keep from hunting him down.

As has been already recorded, the wretched man had heard them talking while concealed behind the log, shivering in momentary fear lest they should turn and see him lying there; but it had not been so fated, and for that time he had escaped.

His main object, of course, in seeking these wilds was to hide himself from the eyes of his brother's friends, and to do this he intended seeking the Blackfeet.

Some years previous Sam had been quite a noted leader among the red men, and was known far and wide as the White Chief.

He had led the Blackfeet to victory many a time against their enemies, the Crows, and even the Sioux, but had refused to war upon his own people, which had proved that there was some good in him.

They would not let him return to the whites, so that even against his will he had been obliged to remain among them, only escaping at last by stealth.

These people would no doubt welcome him gladly, and among them he might, perhaps, find immunity from danger. Hence, after escaping the clutches of his enemies when he lay behind the log, he headed straight for the Indian village, and when Pandy Ellis and Blue Bill once more saw the ghost of the old ranger's departed pard, they were not a great distance from the Indian village.

Darkness had settled down over the land, and all chances of following the trail seemed about gone, but Pandy was equal to the emergency.

Drawing out a genuine bull's-eye dark-lantern such as burglars and the police use, he lighted it, and then away went the two men on the trail.

They made good time, though, of course, so long as the fugitive kept on he would be likely to gain upon them. Before two hours had gone by, Pandy came to an abrupt halt, declaring solemnly that he could smell an Indian town ahead. Hardly had he uttered these words when the bushes around them seemed fairly alive with the redskins who had lain in ambush.

CHAPTER XXV.

SEPARATED.

SAM WHERITT, the maker of the marked trail, had been in luck so far, for he had succeeded in eluding those who were upon his track, and besides, was near the Blackfoot town where he expected to find safety.

He had been hastening through the forest when he came unexpectedly upon a large band of Indians, led by a sub-chief who was known as Buffalo Bend.

At first the Blackfeet had made demonstrations of hostility; indeed, there would have been very little chance for an ordinary ranger had he been in the place of the fugitive.

He knew very well what to do, however, and with his hands made several gestures, that were understood by the Indians.

At first they did not quite understand, and stood rooted in amazement.

A fire that had before been half smothered and nearly dead—so that they had heard the man who had been undergrowth some time—reached them—had been resurrected upon the track being made, so that

there was no difficulty in the parties seeing each other.

When finally the Indians recognized their former leader in many a hard-fought battle, they greeted him with the greatest enthusiasm, and for the first time since that fatal duel, Sam Wheritt felt as though he was safe.

He did not know the men who were on his trail even then, or he would not have considered himself safe with an army around him.

When the Indians heard that Blue Bill, and the famous border trapper, old Pandy Ellis, were upon the trail of their white chief, they said but little, though their actions were significant.

The White Chief was sent forward to the village in charge of a guide, and then the redskins, stealing through the forest along Sam's back trail for a score or two of yards, proceeded to lay in ambush for the two rangers.

They knew Pandy of old, and were quite confident that he would not give up a trail in which he was so intensely interested, simply because darkness happened to come on.

In this supposition they were quite correct, as the reader has already seen.

When the yelling demons sprang up on every side of them, and several fires of touchwood that had been held in readiness, were ignited, the scene was one of tremendous power.

Both men were familiar with such, and saw nothing strange in it, but there was certainly a weirdness and power such as none but a master hand could have transferred to canvas.

Above the demoniac cries of the red men there now sounded the cracking of fire-arms as the two men used their rifles with fatal effect upon those of their foes who were nearest.

Then the scene became a *melee*.

Forty against two would be considered fearful odds at any time, and our friends, of course, had no thought of victory. All they wanted was to get away, and toward this end were all their endeavors made.

Although it was seldom the case that Pandy Ellis did not carry a whirlwind of victory, with him, yet there were times when circumstances were too much for him, and retreat advisable, unless he wished to commit suicide.

Such, in fact, was the present.

Knowing the utter folly of attempting to combat this horde of savage foes, at least, to a successful termination, he and Blue Bill had at once made up their minds to get out of it, though, of course, they would leave their marks behind them.

Both men fought like warriors bold, and accomplished wonders, though, of course, as usual, Pandy's hurricane style of business was more effective as regarded the fruitful results than his companion's methodical manner of fighting.

The Indians could not stand up before him. Try as they would, they melted before his clubbed rifle like snow before the summer sun, and there were many who learned more in a practical way, about old Pandy Ellis, during the few minutes he was among them, than it had ever entered their minds to conceive before. There is nothing so apt as practical illustration. You may tell a man that it is unpleasant to take a dose of strychnine and he believes you, but can only realize how unpleasant the result is after he has had a personal application.

The Indians knew with whom they had to deal, and exerted themselves to the utmost to either capture or kill the veteran trapper; but when they determined upon this course they were pursuing a difficult matter.

To tell the truth, the old ranger seemed to bear a charmed life, and so far as capturing him was concerned, during his whole life upon the border the ranger could only remember it one or two times when he was in the power of his foes.

Like a whirlwind, then, he rushed here and there, leaving a death track behind him, and before the fight had been in progress two minutes the redskins had given up all hope of capturing him.

Blue Bill had not been quite so fortunate, for although he, too, had proved a giant in strength, hurling the redskins this way and that, there came a time presently when a spent bullet, glancing from a tree near by, struck him on the head.

Though he still retained his senses, the blow seemed to weaken and confuse him, so that before he could recover himself, a portion of the red band had hurled themselves upon him, bearing him to the earth.

He was soon in their power, and they quickly lashed his hands together.

Old Pandy was still raging about like a lion, but as the force that had been disposing of Blue Bill could now be spared to unite with the others against him, the time had come when he must of necessity turn his back on the foe.

He had not the time to see that his comrade was a prisoner.

Had he known this, nothing could have induced the hero to leave the place.

Upon looking around, and finding the gallant ranger missing, he took it for granted that Blue Bill, deeming discretion the better part of valor when the odds were so great, had seized upon the opportunity to vamoose the ranch.

So old Pandy concluded that he could not do better than to leave the field to the redmen, though not in the least alarmed as to his safety.

Giving a hoarse yell of defiance, the veteran ranger burst through his assailants as a giant would a pack of pigmies, and leaping into the surrounding bushes, vanished from view.

Lying there upon the ground, with his hands secured, and an Indian kneeling upon his breast, Blue Bill saw him depart, and understood exactly the mistake under which he labored; but not a word would the brave fellow utter to bring him back, for he realized how great the existing odds were against a single man, and knew that in all probability a better chance for rescue would be prevented.

Thus the two comrades were separated; would it please fate to again unite them? We shall see.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PINNED TO THE CABIN WALL.

It had seemed as though the young white ranger, Reckless Rupert, was about to have his escape frustrated after all.

The captors of Blue Bill, contrary to the custom of the Indians, had entered the village quietly with their prisoner, no doubt because they had lost so many of their number that shame had seized upon them.

A portion of the band having charge of Blue Bill made at once toward the prison lodge, unaware of the fact that it had already an occupant. As they drew near they were amazed to hear the death-cry of Wolf-Trailer.

At the same time several warriors, leaping erect, informed them that they had been stationed there as guards.

A rush was made immediately for the Death Lodge, and to the amazement of all, the door was found secure.

In their haste and excitement a slight hitch occurred, some pulling the door before the bar had been withdrawn, which, of course, rendered the task a doubly hard one.

This caused a delay of perhaps a minute, and was the salvation of the white hunter; for had the door been thrown open immediately he would have been found clinging to the side of the cabin.

As it was he found time to gain the opening, and clamber through.

When the red-men finally opened the door and rushed into the place, they were able to see immediately the hole in the roof. What first chained their attention, however, was the body of the slain Blackfoot brave, whose hatred for the prisoner had led him to adopt the strange tactics that had eventually brought him to his death.

One of them bent over and turned the dead brave upon his back, when he was recognized.

"Wolf-Trailer!" they said.

From this state of stupefaction they were aroused by cries without, which told plainly of another combat of some description, and thoroughly worked up to a tremendous pitch of excitement, the braves lost no time in rushing out, half believing that the terrible Pandy Ellis had already followed them, and was effecting the rescue of his comrade, Blue Bill.

This they speedily found was an error on their part, for those in whose charge the trapper had been left were not engaged in any turmoil, nor had Blue Bill exhibited any desire to escape.

It was speedily ascertained that the sounds of fighting had come from the other side of the lodge; indeed, a piteous sort of moaning told them something of this sort even then, and with weapons ready the excited Blackfeet rushed hastily around the prison lodge to find—what?

Reckless Rupert had lost no time in clambering upon the roof of the lodge, and when the red men had managed to open the door he was dangling from the further end ready to jump.

Down he went like a rocket, struck the earth, staggered a little because of his peculiar situation, and just as he recovered and was about to dart away, felt a pair of naked arms glide around his person.

One of the Blackfeet had mistrusted that something was wrong when the door of the prison lodge was found barred after they had heard that terrible cry proceed from within, and had guarded the entrance until it was opened.

He found out.

When the ranger dropped from the roof he began to understand that an escape of some kind was contemplated and being put into execution,

sailing under false

[Faint, illegible markings]

It is a common mistake to think that the only way to avoid the problems of the first two cases is to adopt a third, more radical, solution: to reject the idea of a single, objective truth. This is the position of relativism, which claims that truth is relative to the culture or society in which it is found. While this may seem to avoid the problems of the first two cases, it has its own difficulties. For example, if truth is relative, then there is no way to resolve disagreements between different cultures or societies. This could lead to a state of perpetual conflict and misunderstanding.

himself . . .
Coming . . .
was no . . .

imitated an Indian's gait to a nicety and saluted the other in the Blackfoot tongue.

The following words passed between them:

"Wolf Eye has come infrom the trail before the rest. Has he bad news or good?"

"What he carries both bad news and good. He came before the rest because he was left for dead upon the field. He met palefaces over the ridge, as many again as we were, and it was only after hard fighting that we conquered. My brothers pursued them, and Wolf Eye was left among the dead. They will soon be here to speak for themselves. Wolf Eye is wounded and weak; will his brother help him to his lodge?"

This was a cunning stroke of policy on the part of the old ranger. The brave readily consented, and though evidently burning with curiosity to hear the details of the fight, asked no more questions, but conducted the bogus Wolf Eye to a lodge near at hand, after which he hastened away, eager to communicate all he knew to the rest, so that when the warriors arrived about midnight with their prisoner, they found a few of the leading chiefs and braves in the council lodge awaiting them, although otherwise the village seemed locked in slumber.

Old Pandey had learned that his disguise was a remarkably good one, and also that he was to sail under the classic name of Wolf Eye, so long as he maintained his present disguise.

He had a lodge all to himself, too, from which he might observe much that occurred, first making a slit in the rear in order to insure a road to retreat in case of necessity.

His meeting with Silver Rifle was intentional on his part, and discovering how the land lay, he disclosed himself to the prairie sharp-shooter, whom he had seen several times before this.

The young man was very much encouraged to think that so well known a ranger as the veteran Pandey Ellis was with him in his work, which would now have a much better chance of suc-

Between them they had taken Dolly from the place where she was kept, and were devising means for rescuing the gallant ranger who had risked so much for the two fugitives, when fortune brought him directly into their midst.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BLUE BILL IN DURANCE VILE.

Brave reckless Rupert was generally considered a rollicking fellow, full of wit and good nature, but no sooner did he find himself in the presence of Dolly, the girl whom he secretly and passionately loved, than speaking in a desultory manner.

Thought remained, but he seemed more like a stammerer in his actions than a man.

To his eyes, the young prairie sharp-shooter did not look a lover's part at all, and yet she did not seem to be offended at his coldness.

"Poor girl, she has become used to it, I suppose," thought Rupert.

Then the color flashed into his cheek as she laid her hand to him, and he could feel it throbbing in his.

His eyes were downcast, and something about his manner—as seen by the light that reached the interior of the cabin through the slit that formed the door—made the hunter's heart throb wildly.

Did she care more for him than as a friend? The thought was Heaven itself, and yet he dared not believe it.

He had left home and all that was dear to him for the sake of Silver Rifle, and could such a love be false to its idol?

No, he was either deceiving himself, or else without knowing what she was doing Dolly had tried to win him to hide her heart-pain at the duplicity of her lover in acting as he did toward the young Indian maiden, Singing Swan.

Thus the thoughts of the hunter ran, and his mind was made up that he would not by word or deed strive to win the love of one who had already given herself to the man of her choice.

He would always be her slave, and if Heaven were only kind enough to send him the opportunity, oh, what a sweet boon he would deem it to die for her, his first and truest love.

It was the quietest possible time and place to have such a scene, for the Blackfeet were rushing about and to and fro, intent on discovering whether the fugitives had gone.

Whether or not they had also discovered the position of Pandey, none of their friends could have guessed, for the event was likely to be kept secret at all times.

But he was not fully gratified, and taken to the interior of the council lodge, where he was seated, and seemed to the ground by the sound of his feet, to be passing over his head the great council of the nation.

and half a dozen outside as sentries, it seemed a hopeless task to think of escape, and yet Blue Bill knew full well that Pandey Ellis would never forsake him.

Before this he had been in equally perilous situations, and always came out first best; and as there was so much consolation in this thought, he could not see but that he might do it again.

Strange events indeed were clustering about the Blackfoot village on this night, and enemies seemed closing in upon them from all directions.

Through the dense forest, miles away, a long line of mounted men rode forward in silence like so many specters; but when an open space was reached, through which they were compelled to pass, the bright moonlight falling upon them revealed the cavalry uniform of United States soldiers.

On the other side three men were looking upon the village of the Blackfeet from the shelter of the trees, and wondering what in creation had occurred to make the Indians resemble a nest of hornets rudely disturbed.

It was the intention of old Pandey to get the three out of the place as quickly as possible, and then devote himself to the rescue of Blue Bill.

By making several predatory excursions to neighboring lodges, he managed to secure weapons for all of them, so that in case of discovery they would be able to show their teeth.

He had already marked out their line of retreat during his little scouts.

Back of the lodge was a little ravine that led to the forest, and along this they could make their way, eventually bringing up, if discovery was avoided, at the place where they wished to be.

During this time the whole village was, of course, in a terrible uproar, and braves were bounding in every direction, seeking for those who had escaped, for it had by this time been discovered that not only the white girl, but also the prairie sharp-shooter had disappeared.

The Indians were furious.

In the place of three prisoners they had one, but this was poor consolation when they might just as easily as not have held the whole four.

Our friends waited until the clamor had quieted down somewhat, and then determined to make an attempt to reach the forest. It was dangerous remaining in the lodge, for at any moment some warrior might intrude upon them, and then all would be lost. On the other hand, once the forest was gained they would in a certain degree be safe, and could wait at the rendezvous appointed until old Pandey had made his attempt to free his comrade in arms.

The reason of the village seeming more quiet was because the Indians were assembled at the other end. A grand council was to be held in the great lodge, fires were being sprung into existence in a dozen places, and all was bustle and furor, which necessarily left the other end of the town quiet and almost deserted, just as nice an arrangement as our friends could have wished.

Pandey was anxious to put into operation an exceedingly daring plan he had just conceived, so they waited no longer, but under his guidance entered the ravine and skulked along. Half way to the forest, and at the edge of the Indian town, he parted from them, returning to the place of danger to carry out the boldest plan of his life.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAN IN THE LOG.

"BARS' claws an' buffler hcofs, but yer news takes my breath away!"

As the old Colorado ranger uttered these words he sank back upon a log, as if in truth entirely overcome.

"Now break it gently ter me. 'Tarnal snakes an' snails! thet air ther wust piece o' intelligence I hev heard fur many a day. My ole friend Bolly Wherrit dead—murdered! Thar's more in them words nor I kin get through my head ter onet."

"How war it, pard? Hed a sort o' duel wid his brother, shot kinder in the air, an' war laid out stiff an' cold. He war forced inter it, war he? Waal, now, ye bet yer bottom dollar thet thar won't be any need o' forcing me if I ever lay eyes on that cuss o' a brother."

"How's that? Ther air critters on his trail now, up in the nor'west hyar? What! Blue Bill air up hyar, an' dear ole Pandey Ellis, ragin' around like so many wild steers broke loose, I reckon? Then ther ain't no use o' my takin' a hand in ther game 'cept the chances should put me on the trail o' the critter what done this foul deed."

"I seen Sam Wherrit at Brown's Hole on my way up here, an' ef I hed only knowed then wat I do now, ther wouldn't hev been enough o' him left ter tell of it."

"I seen him dead. The man I velted in an' out the same tanket, I seen him dead."

wid, tramped alongside an' swore by these twenty years back, gone under. Heavings ter Betsy, but it makes me feel queer; my flesh creeps ter think o' it. No wonder ole Pandey air a ragin' like a wild bull. Sausage an' sauerkraut! tie me up in a blanket an' throw me inter ther great Colorado canyon ef I kin realize thet ole Bolly Wherrit air planted underground."

"Neither air he, ole hoss!"

The words came from he knew not where. It might have been the air above, the earth beneath, but of one thing old Ralph was quite positive about, and this was that his comrade had not given utterance to them, as he had been watching him at the time.

The old ranger sat there as if stupefied.

It was surely the voice of Bolly Wherrit that he heard, and coming upon the heels of the awful intelligence imparted by the little detective concerning the prairie duel, it aroused every grain of superstition in his nature.

Was Bolly's ghost speaking to him from the tomb?

The moon was shining brightly, and lit up the little glade. He was quite positive that the voice came from the surrounding forest. A cold chill began to creep over his frame.

Roaring Ralph feared neither man, beast nor devil, and had often proved his claim to the name of reckless bravery when others held back, but somehow the thought of being addressed by the ghost of a departed friend, who had lain moldering in the grave a month or two back, made him feel queer, and rooted him to his seat when his inclinations urged him to leap up.

"Traps an' trails! Dust my Sunday breeches, did ye hear that voice, kimrade? I wonder ef it air a sign that I'm goin' too, soon. Histe me into a Pache's grave, but I'll swar that war the voice o' Bolly Wherrit, Pandey's ole pard, and ther man we say hez been under the sod this month er so. 'Trowers an' tomcats, but I'm a hull quandary mixed up!"

"Yer a blamed fool, ole Ralph, ef ye want ter know it."

Roaring Ralph this time sprang up as if imbued with a sudden shock from an electric battery, and giving one great leap, turned and faced the log on which he had been seated.

The detective still stood motionless, for he did not fully understand the matter, and there was nothing ghost-like about the proceedings to him.

"Painters an' powder-horns! rub me agin a hay-cutter ef he hain't addressin' me from ther grave. Bolly, ole chap, air that ye?"

"I reckon it are, old duffer," came the muffled and mysterious voice.

"Mustangs and Mexicans! Whar air ye—an' kin I do anything ter ease yer sperit, departed kimrade?" asked the accommodating ranger.

"I'm in this hyar blasted ole log, an' stuck fast; so I reckon ther best thing yo' kin do fur ther sperit o' ther departed Bolly Wherrit are ter pull his body out o' hyar right lively, afore I split ther log a-harfin'!"

Roaring Ralph stood dumbfounded.

Amazement compelled him to lose the use of his limbs for the time being, but his eyes, attracted by a movement to the end of the log, could not help but see a pair of moccasined feet waving in the air.

He could only stand there and repeat, in a monotonous undertone to himself, the remark: "Don't say Sunday breeches, it's hain't! I kin tell it by them moccasins!"

Finally the hunter and man became impatient, and, aroused by his exclamation, the reckless ranger seized hold of the moccasined feet and commenced pulling.

In this matter the difficulty was soon bridled over, though it was pretty tough on the elbows of the man in the log, for they rubbed against the sides of the log, and threatened to remain inside for good.

Muscular force triumphed, however.

It was not necessary that the little detective should have been standing in the log, he would have been able to pull it out of the log, so, for the sake of the log, he stepped into it, and heaved his body up there and began to pull with the perspiration poured down his face. It was so exceedingly funny to see the hunter and man pulling away at the pair of buckskins and moccasins, drawing the inmate of the log forward by a series of successive pulls, and the log, in an unceasing, muffled tone of voice from the inside to be "Careful now," "take it easy, Roarin' Ralph, fur this are a pesky nice pickle," and so on.

Finally the crisis came.

Roaring Ralph exerted himself to the utmost, and the man in the log also used his muscles, and the log came out.

How the hunter had become stuck in the log, and how he was pulled out, was probably the funniest thing that had ever happened into one's finger.

very easy to put in but deuced hard to pull out, his arms illustrating a double barb.

Had it not been for the presence of our rollicking old friend, the imprisoned ranger could never have come out of that end of the log where he had entered, but would have been compelled to crawl along and eventually cut through the half rotten terminus with his knife.

Upon being thus set at liberty the old ranger stooped over and took his rifle from the cavity that had so lately been his prison, after which he faced Roaring Ralph.

It was the mysterious old ranger whose adventures with the mounted Blackfeet we have witnessed.

"Dust my Sundy breeches!" roared the reckless trapper, "ef it ain't Pandey Ellis' pard, Bolly Wherrit, in ther flesh!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

PANDY'S PARD.

SURE enough, the man whom Roaring Ralph had pulled from the old log was none other than the famous pard of Pandey Ellis, the man whose supposed death by his brother Sam Wherrit had brought the veteran prairie prince and his friend, Blue Bill, to this land of danger in pursuit of the suspected murderer.

It was almost universally believed by those who knew anything at all about the matter that Bolly had been slain in the duel with his brother, when in reality he had only been stunned by the ball.

The stupendous pair of mistakes in this comedy of errors was partly due to chance, and the remainder left to the man who had carried the seemingly dead Bolly Wherrit away.

This man secretly hated the ranger, but dared attempt no bodily harm to him through fear of his partner, Pandey Ellis.

He adopted a line of action, however, that was likely to bring about satisfactory results and yet not get him into danger, should it ever come to the light of day.

When Bolly came to his senses, he was solemnly assured by this pretended friend that his bullet, although intended to be shot at random, had found the heart of his brother, who had died immediately, cursing him with his last breath.

As might have been expected, this intelligence stunned the old ranger. In imagination he again saw his days of childhood, when he and his brother played together, and gradually a feeling of horror came over him as he realized what he had done.

He fancied that the finger of scorn would now be pointed at him, as the man who had murdered his half-drunk brother in a duel, and in the end resolved to lose himself in the trackless wilderness where no white man would find him, and where he could pass the remainder of his days in peace and repentance.

The very first person he met on his journey was a man who told him that his brother had been killed, and that he was the murderer. He supposed all along, was told by the man who had carried him away, and Roaring Ralph talking while seated upon the log into which he had crawled for sleep some time previously.

It sent a shiver through his whole frame to know that he had been deceived, and that the man he was supposed to have killed was in reality fleeing from the vengeance of Pandey Ellis.

Then the thought that his old comrade was somewhere in the vicinity was a pleasing one, and, not knowing how often he would see him, he took him for a short time to the grave to demand vengeance, and to meet the old man face to face, for the first time since he had fled from him, Blue Bill.

When, then, he greeted Pandey Ellis, and heard him say that his brother was dead, he was not surprised.

Bolly was exceedingly anxious to see his partner for several reasons. In the first place it was but natural that he should desire to see the man who had been all his life his partner, and who had been with him for forty years, the partner of his every joy and sorrow, and the man who had risked his life for him.

He also wanted to see the man who had carried him away, and who had told him that his brother was dead, and who had told him that he was the murderer.

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ed to let his partner know that he was in the land of the living before it was too late.

He had lost his horse, for the animal had received a wound during the flight after leaving the Indians at the large rock upon the prairie, and as it grew worse, the ranger at length turned him loose.

He had little need of a horse in this country, anyhow, and especially when he had no other in view save to conceal himself in the wilderness.

Being desirous, therefore, of accomplishing several things, the little party held a short consultation, and it was then decided that they move on to the Indian village.

They therefore left the hollow log and moved forward, heading through the forest in the direction whence the Blackfoot town lay, according to their judgment.

Little did they suspect what thrilling events were taking place within the confines of that village of the wilderness, in which those they sought were prominent actors.

As they were not far from the Indian town, it took them but a little time to draw near its confines.

Even while they gazed upon the many lodges, a band of specter-like figures glided past some little distance to the right, though they could not distinguish them well enough to make sure whether they were all Indians or not.

Then began a most terrific row in the village. What had occurred they could not guess. Whether the silent figures were foes and had been on the scalp trail, or some internal affair created the uproar, was a mystery.

The first idea was soon disposed of, for the shouts all tended one way, and betokened rage and searching. Could old Pandey be mixed up in this affair?

This last thought occurred to Bolly first, but no sooner had he mentioned it to the others than they quickly coincided with him, for unless Pandey was somehow concerned in the affair, it could hardly have been created.

They could see the braves rushing here and there, hither and thither, like angry bees, the torches some of them carried flashing for all the world like so many Jack-o'-lanterns in a southern swamp.

Presently, however, the racket seemed to subside, and they saw several large fires spring into existence at the other end of the village, while toward that point all the warriors were hastening.

At first they thought some of the lodges must have been given to the flames, and as the breeze was brisk, expected to see a grand sight, but it became evident after a little that this was a false view of the matter.

Roaring Ralph speedily guessed the truth.

The Indians had a prisoner of renown, of whom they were afraid, lest he should escape them.

This fact, together with the other events that had so recently occurred among them (chief of which was the escape of Reckless Rupert after killing the two renowned warriors, and the mysterious disappearance of himself and the other two pale-faces, of which, however, the three men in the bushes could only guess, as they knew nothing about it to a certainty), was deemed sufficient to be the cause of calling a gathering in the council-lodge, in order to have a grand pow-wow.

It was Roaring Ralph who suggested that they listen to what was said, and Bolly instantly agreed with him.

A few minutes were enough for them to decide upon their plan.

The little detective was to remain at the terminus of the village, and if there were any signs of a disturbance, he would be the first to start, and if he saw any of the pale-faces, he would immediately communicate to the nearest Indian.

Having thus arranged matters, the two old rangers crept in the direction of the council-lodge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COUNCIL-LODGE.

THE council-lodge of the Blackfeet was a singular affair, being nothing more nor less than a circus tent.

It was not one of the very large ones, by any means, but was circular, and about twenty feet in diameter.

It had been put up by the Indians, and the poles belonging to it were the same as those of the novices in the circus line. The tent was nearly done; in fact, the whole thing was a decided leaning in the direction of the circus.

rope attached to a deeply imbedded stake, the wind would have carried it over in a twinkling.

Pandey Ellis saw this in an instant, as he made a half circuit of the great tent, and like a flash a brilliant thought entered his head, which he retained for future use.

There was something of a crowd of squaws and boys gathered around the tent, into which most of the men were passing.

The bogus Wolf-Eye, with a daring that had often distinguished him, hesitated only long enough to make sure that his revolvers were in reach, and his knife easy of access, when he followed the Indians inside.

It was an astonishing spectacle.

The Blackfeet were forming in a circle around the tent, the chiefs inside and the braves further back. They had got the hang of the hoop around the center-pole, for a dozen stolen canoes were blazing upon its tin sconces. It had been drawn up a dozen feet from the ground and the cord secured to the pole below. With every extra violent gust of wind, the hoop would swing to and fro, so that the effect upon the sea of dusky faces was strangely weird.

Altogether it was one of the most singular spectacles upon which old Pandey Ellis had ever gazed.

Standing near the center of the tent, he saw his comrade and fellow-avenger, Blue Bill. The ranger showed only defiance and disdain upon his face; fear had no abiding place there.

Among the chiefs, and yet only taking the part of a listener in the council, was a white man, and this Pandey felt sure must be the maker of the Marked Moccasin trail, the man he sought in order to avenge the death of his old partner; however, this was hardly the proper time for settling that feud; it would keep yet awhile, and in the meantime all of his energies must be devoted towards rescuing Blue Bill from the red fiends.

To speak honestly, this was task enough for any man, no matter what his reputation for cunning and bravery might be.

It was indeed both a strange and thrilling spectacle that old Pandey gazed upon, but he was not fool enough to attract attention by staring around, but walked quietly over to a point just back of the tent. He saw Blue Bill, and he saw a keen glance as he passed by, but he did not tell whether the ranger had recognized him. He seemed hardly to notice him, and yet he knew that Blue Bill was more than ordinarily keen, and had always boasted that he could tell Pandey Ellis, even in the disguise of the devil.

It did not take long for the circus tent to fill up with the savages. There was a sober, sullen look upon every dusky face that told how serious their deliberations were to be.

"Tarnal snakes an' buffler hides, but won't this hyer old circus tent see a livelier time to-night than it ever did w'en her horses galloped around it an' ther bars performed," said the old ranger to himself, with a low chuckle of satisfaction.

Finally all were seated, and it so happened that Pandey found himself vis-a-vis with Buffalo Bend, the sub-chief, who had led the party that had been in ambush for Blue Bill and himself.

Several times he had found this man looking at him in a most peculiar manner, and at last he had come to the conclusion that Buffalo Bend possessed a secret in which he was deeply interested.

The council opened with the usual formalities, although the blowing of smoke to the four cardinal points of the compass was omitted on this occasion, and the pipe only passed among the chiefs and head warriors.

Then silence fell.

Suddenly one of the chiefs sprang to his feet, and delivered a short, impassioned address in which he told the warriors of the Indians at the head of the prairie, and declared that only warriors sons of the better race could win the right of the land of the earth.

Having held his say and told his tale, he sat down, and the council went on.

He was seated by Pandey, who was looking at him with a keen eye, and a look of intense interest.

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He was looking at him with a keen eye, and a look of intense interest.

"A strange thing has happened," said the sub-chief, in intense tones; "while we returned home, we came across the lifeless form of a warrior, shorn of his clothes, stripped of his head-dress, robbed of all he possessed." Turning to the disguised trapper, he thundered forth: "Spirit of the departed Wolf-Eye, what would you have? Why have you not remained in the Happy Hunting Grounds? Speak!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WOLF IN THE FOLD.

THE scene was amazing.

Every Indian turned his eyes upon the warrior addressed. They did not understand the irony in Buffalo Bend's voice, and fully believed that the ghost of the departed Wolf-Eye had, for some reason or other, attended their council.

It was not an every-day occurrence to have the spirit of a departed brave come back from the death-land and assume his old position, and there were doubtless many among the Indians who would just as leave learn something of the unknown country to which every one of them would some day be compelled to journey.

Hence the words of the sub-chief created even more excitement among the braves than he had bargained for.

As for the disguised trapper, he did not wait long.

Knowing that the game was up so far as his remaining in disguise was concerned, he sprang to his feet.

One agile leap carried him to the open space in the center of the assembly, where he stood, glaring around at the redmen like a lion at bay.

He was an adept in the Blackfeet language, and could speak it like a native, so that when he opened his mouth and uttered words, those around him did not immediately jump at the truth.

"The spirit of Wolf-Eye has come over the river from the death-land to speak to his brothers. There is danger in the air. A man whom they fear is even now among them. Wolf-Eye has come back, but not as he went, for he has changed into another. Warriors, look well on me; do ye not now Heavy-Knife when you see him? Squaws, every one of you. A white man spits on you and offends you. Where are the Blackfeet when the arrows strike? Hiding in their lodges, with the arrows of squaws upon them. There is not a warrior among you. A white man defies you all. He has come among you to save his friend, and when he leaves, death will be behind him. Watch, squaws and papposes of the Blackfeet nation, and see the act of a fearless man."

Old Pandey had rattled this out in the Blackfeet dialect.

Two hundred blazing orbs were fastened upon him; half that number of faces darkened with the most savage of scowls.

Call an Indian a squaw and you give him the deadliest insult known, because they look down on squaws so much.

The disguised ranger had added insult to injury.

Not only had he come among them in the disguise of a comrade whom his own hand had in all probability slain, but he had defied them, called them squaws, and declared that one white brave was enough to whip the whole of them.

Never in the history of their tribe had the Blackfeet been so effectually bulldozed and brow-beaten. It was a time they would not be apt to forget in a hurry.

Ha! had they not the old ranger in their power? Spite of words, did they not hold the winning hand? A hundred men were around him, and half as many more upon the outside of the lodge. Was not escape thus rendered impossible?

Pandey Ellis, after delivering his exordium, lost no time in fruitless speculation, but with one agile spring reached the side of his friend Blue Bill.

All the eyes that watched him were not hostile, however.

While the Indians were giving their ideas relative to the business on hand, two forms had crept up near the back of the great lodge.

The cunning with which they made their way forward, screening themselves from the view of any Indians, whether male or female, who happened to be moving about, proclaimed their character.

Of course these two were old Bolly Wherrit and Roaring Ralph, who had made their way up from the lower end of the village.

They recognized Blue Bill, of course, but amazement would have been a poor word to express their feelings when the mock Wolf-Eye proclaimed himself to be the daring old trapper king, Pandey Ellis.

They had by good fortune come upon that end of the tent furthest away from the fires. It was also the point from which the wind blew, and where the one rope strained with the force of the gale.

This needs particular mention in order that what occurred may be fully comprehended, for Pandey's movement, made to effect the rescue of Blue Bill, and get both of them out of the scrape, was one of the most brilliant of his life.

The hands of Blue Bill had been bound, but his feet were of course free.

When the old ranger reached the side of his comrade in distress, he held a long knife in one hand and his death-dealing revolver in the other.

To cut the bonds that confined the wrists of Blue Bill was but the work of an instant, and then Pandey thrust into the hand of his friend the revolver.

Having accomplished this much, he was ready to turn his attention to the redskins.

As may be readily supposed, the Blackfeet chiefs and warriors, although stunned in a degree by the presence of this hated and feared trapper king among them, were rapidly recovering their accustomed equanimity.

This was made evident by the loud outcries that began to make themselves heard.

Fortunately, Pandey's plan was a feasible one. Leaping over to the great pole in the middle of the tent, he drew his knife across the cord that sustained the round hoop upon which rested the stolen candles with which the council lodge was lighted.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BORDER WHIRLWIND.

WHEN the disguised Pandey Ellis drew his keen knife over the cord that sustained the weight of the wooden circular hoop that held the half dozen candles in tin sconces, there could be but one result.

The cord passed up through a ring near the top of the pole, and thence down to the bottom.

As almost every one of my readers know, this is used in the circus for raising the lights when the trapeze performers take their turn at recreation in sailing through the air.

No sooner had the ranger's knife parted the strands than he held the end of the cord.

Springing back half a dozen feet, he gave it a strong and sudden pull, elevating the lights still half a dozen feet further, then suddenly let go of the cord.

Down came the hoop with a crash.

Darkness ensued.

So far Pandey's plan had worked admirably, but of course there was more to follow.

A tremendous uproar ensued when the lights were thus suddenly extinguished, for every Indian seemed to vie with the rest in yelling himself hoarse.

Although the candles were about all extinguished by the sudden descent of the hoop to which they were fastened, the darkness that ensued was not very intense.

Through the large opening and over the heads of the Indians who crowded it, the light from the fires managed to enter. They had not been cared for so well since the council commenced, but still were capable of giving quite enough light to distinguish different persons.

A few hurried words in the ear of Blue Bill quickly let him into the main particulars of Pandey's plan, and he was ready to second it.

Toward the back of the great tent they made their way.

There were several reasons for this.

In the first place, it was dark there, while the half-consumed fires lighted up the front. Then again, those of the Indians who could not enter the lodge had gathered in front of it, where they knew something of what was going on within through the telegraph signs from one of their friends.

To rush through this crowd would necessitate much more danger and fighting than would be apt to fall to their share in the other direction.

There was one more cause for the old ranger's selection of this route, as will be speedily made manifest.

When Blue Bill and himself sprang into the midst of their enemies, they had only to strike and shoot to make sure of hitting foes, so dense were the Indians around them.

Pandey kept his huge knife busily at work, and those who have seen this ranger in a hand-to-hand encounter, can readily believe that he did a wonderful amount of execution with the keen blade.

Blue Bill, on the other hand, managed to bring his seven-shooter into considerable play, for it was not a difficult matter to send a bullet into

an enemy when the Indians were just beyond the muzzle of his weapon.

They forced their passage in this way from the center of the lodge toward the rear, and as death seemed to be in league with them, the Indians gave way before their assaults like lambs turning from a couple of wolves that had broken into the fold, only the ferocious Blackfeet did not much resemble innocent lambs.

Dealing their blows right and left, our two friends began to draw near the canvas side of the tent. Many of the Indians, upon the first sign of a rumpus, had made for the opening, and as might have been expected, the natural result was that they were between the two stout poles forming the sides of the doorway, so that not a soul could pass out unless he exercised cunning and crowded under the canvas at the side.

This was the condition of affairs at the time when the two rangers reached the canvas.

Their passage through the Indians had not been entirely free from return thrusts, for the Blackfeet braves were not the ones to tamely submit to being trodden down. Like the rattlesnake, they would thrust out their poisoned fangs at the enemy, even when in the agony of death.

Both of the whites had received several wounds in the affair, but fortunately none of them were of a serious nature, nor did they impede the actions of the men.

Together they reached the canvas at the end of the circus tent.

The bowie and revolver had opened a way for them when forcing a passage seemed an impossible task, and the path of blood left behind them attested to the terrible nature of this proceeding.

Pandey paused for a few seconds, but only to cast a hurried glance behind him. The Indians nearest the center of the tent had rescued one or two of the candles and coaxed them into a flame, so that he was enabled to get a dim idea of the confusion that reigned supreme within the grand council lodge of the Blackfeet.

It was most certainly a sight he would never forget.

Many of the excited redskins had become wedged in the doorway, as has been said before, while others were sprawling upon hands and knees, either trying to crawl under the canvas, or endeavoring to escape the deadly fire of the pale-faces.

Then there was the crowd near the center of the tent, ready for a meeting with the foes of their race, just as if an army of scouts and trappers was about to be precipitated upon them.

Pandey Ellis gave vent to a terrific war-cry, that rang out like a paean of victory above the yells of the excited Blackfeet.

Then his blood-stained knife made one downward swoop.

As he had intended, the canvas was rent by the blow, leaving a means of egress for his comrade and himself.

Through this they went with all speed, and almost before the Indians, who had caught sight of them by the aid of the resurrected candles, could realize it, they were on the outside of the great tent.

Here Pandey came to an abrupt pause.

The wind was blowing small guns, as a sailor would have probably expressed it, and the tent was straining at the long rope that held it, like a ship at her cable.

In an instant the old ranger's keen knife was at the rope.

There was a sharp report, almost like the discharge of a pistol, and the faithful rope had parted. Unable longer to withstand the force of the gale, the great tent seemed to totter for a dozen seconds, and then, to the horror of the Indians, came down with a rush, entangling fully four score of redskins under the canvas.

CHAPTER XXXV.

READY FOR VENGEANCE.

THAT was certainly a night of the most tragic events ever known to the denizens of the Blackfeet village.

The little detective had remained in the lower part of the village, among the lodges that had been for the time deserted, because all of the owners had gone to the council.

When he heard the racket begin in that direction he felt sure that his comrades, Roaring Ralph and the phantom trapper had fallen into mischief, and remembering their directions to create a diversion in their favor if such a thing was possible, hastened to fire the piles of dried grass.

This was a simple job, and yet he was not suffered to complete the job without encountering resistance.

After he had applied the torch to one of the piles, and was watching the flames leap up, he was amazed to see a human being suddenly bound through the fire with a yell of horror and rage.

The warrior had perhaps been drunk, and concealed himself among the dried grass to sleep off his stupidity.

If so, he must have been horrified to thus suddenly awaken and find his lodging-place in flames. Perhaps the first idea that assailed him was a conviction that he had been transferred, while he slept, to the infernal regions.

At any rate, the little detective never stopped to inquire what the fellow thought. As soon as he saw that the Indian's glaring eyes had become fastened upon him, he hurled the blazing torch square into his face, and then drawing a pistol, followed it up with a bullet that forever put it out of the Indian's way to endanger his safety.

The fierce wind, seizing upon the flames, soon communicated them to the adjoining lodges, and the destruction of the whole Blackfeet village seemed imminent.

Satisfied that the work left to him had been well done, the little detective at once made his way out of the village, aiming for the rendezvous where he was to meet his friends when their part of the job was accomplished.

Meanwhile the scene was growing in wildness at the other end of the village.

When the great tent, no longer supported by the stout guy rope, collapsed, it buried three-fourths of the red warriors underneath it, and such a kicking and scrambling as occurred under that canvas you never did see.

It was every man for himself, and knives were brought into play in order to further the escape of the imprisoned braves. One thing may be taken for granted, and this the fact that the great tent would not be worth much after such a performance.

Those who were near the site crawled out, others came popping through rents made, and the other unfortunates were rescued as speedily as possible.

Pandemonium had certainly broken loose, to judge by the yells that sounded. Never had there been so much excitement within the bounds of the Indian village. There was the escape of the prisoners, Reckless Rupert, Silver Rifle and the pale flower; the capture of Blue Bill; sudden appearance of the terrible Heavy Knife in their sacred council lodge; the tremendous upheaval that followed when he put out the lights and, aided by Blue Bill, cut his way through their crowded ranks; the fall of the circus tent with fully four score of warriors caught underneath it, and finally the fearful discovery that the lower end of the village was on fire, with the fierce wind blowing the flames toward them in a manner significant and dangerous.

No wonder the coolest-headed among the Blackfeet confessed themselves sadly bewildered by this succession of events, and knew not in which direction to turn.

This state of inaction lasted not for long, however; their whole village was in danger from the conflagration, which must be stayed with all possible speed, leaving the pursuit of the daring pale-faces to a later period.

Slowly to reach a culminating point of anger, when such a thing does occur with Indians they are like so many mad wolves; and after all the defeats and indignities they had suffered at the hands of this little party of whites, when the time for retaliation arrived woe unto the wretched pale-faces who should fall into their power; better for them that they had met their fate in the boiling mountain torrent or fierce prairie fire than to suffer the torture the furious Blackfeet would have in store for them.

The Indians went to work with a will to put an end to the conflagration that was already threatening to destroy their entire village. Just here their natural shrewdness came into play. Instead of wasting their time in subduing the flames themselves, which would have been an almost impossible task, considering their limited water supply and facilities for throwing it upon the flames—they wisely resorted to tearing down the lodges in a straight line across the village, and then working towards the flames, saving all they could.

Necessarily, therefore, the fire must come to a close as soon as the barrier presented by the open space was reached.

It happened just as the redskins had considered, for the furious fire finding no new material upon which to feed, seemed to gasp wildly, making ineffectual attempts to reach the lodges beyond, and then slowly succumbed to the inevitable.

The threatening danger of a total destruction of their village by fire having been passed, and

the unfortunates under the great circus tent rescued from their uncomfortable situation, the Blackfeet were now ready to look after the whites.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TRACKED WITH TORCHES.

As has been said before, Bolly Wherrit and the old ranger, Roaring Ralph, watched the strange events that were taking place within the council lodge of the Blackfeet with great interest.

When Pandey Ellis proclaimed himself in the person of Wolf-Eye, they were struck dumb with amazement, and all Roaring Ralph could say was to keep muttering to himself that favorite but wholly incomprehensible expression:

"Dust my Sunday breeches!"

Much as the two men would have delighted in assisting their beloved comrades, this was rendered impossible by the action of old Pandey himself in extinguishing the lights, though when he did so he had no idea that friends were near.

All they could do now was to remain quiet, and with ready weapon, assist the two, should they be so fortunate as to cut their way through the mass of savages and out of the tent.

It was evident that they were making toward the rear end of the great tent, for prudence would teach them that it was the best route for their escape.

Judging by the racket within, the rangers thought the infernal regions had broken loose upon earth.

Presently however a slit appeared in the canvas close to where they were standing, and two men sprang through into the open air.

Even in the semi-gloom of the spot they recognized Blue Bill and the old prince of prairie trappers. When Pandey stooped and cut the rope that proved such a support to the great lodge, both of them held their breath, for they at once grasped his idea.

Then with a crash and a whirl, the whole fabric keeled over.

A true ranger yell broke from the lips of the two lookers-on, and immediately they bounded to the side of Pandey and Blue Bill.

Bolly's great hat was pulled down further than ever over his face, for he did not wish his pard to recognize him yet. He also managed to avoid the old ranger's eye, and naturally Pandey thought it was some friend of Ralph's who was a stranger to him.

At any rate this was no time for the meeting and the questions that would ensue, and Bolly was very wise in restraining his earnest desire to grasp the hand of his chum, and let him know he was still in the lands of the living.

The good news would keep, and now that he was in Pandey's company he could make sure that the vengeance he had sworn upon the alarmed fugitive, Sam Wherrit, did not reach its mark.

In a few words Pandey told that he had left some friends not far away, and towards the lodge of Wolf-Eye he led the way at a swinging trot, the others following, with Bolly Wherrit bringing up the rear.

The moon was now shining in the far eastern sky, but a better light than that was creeping up.

"Looky thar!" suddenly said Roaring Ralph, pointing to the end of the village where the red tongues of flame were already beginning to shoot upward into the air, "chaw my ole moccasin fur soup ef ther little detee ain't gone an' done as we told him. Bullets an' bagonets, but this air exciting fur ther reds."

It was, most certainly, but then they hoped to turn the tables in a short time and make it equally as exciting for the whites.

The distance from the great tent to the lodge of Wolf-Eye was not very great, and they soon reached the latter, having only met one Indian brave on the way, and he had saved his life by darting into a skin teepee, for our friends were in too great a hurry to bother with seeking him out.

Pandey plunged into the lodge, uncertain as yet whether his friends had continued their way or met with some obstacle and returned to the starting point, but as the lodge contained no occupant he was fain to believe that they had gone on.

He led the way into the ravine himself, and as our little party did not care much whether they were seen or not, their progress was much faster than that of Reckless Rupert and his companions had been.

They knew very well that the Indians would not waste much time in fooling about the village, and once on their trail they would follow it with the pertinacity of so many bloodhounds.

When the little band reached the edge of the forest, Pandey led them along for perhaps forty yards, and then drew up in the shadow of a huge

sycamore tree, whose trunk was a perfect giant in point of size.

Here the old ranger chief uttered the cry of the nighthawk very naturally, following it closely with the mournful howl of the timber wolf.

As the racket in the village had died away in part, the signals sounded loud and clear upon the night air.

Immediately three forms appeared in view from the other side of the great tree, one of which was undoubtedly a female.

Of course these were Reckless Rupert, Silver Rifle, and the prairie belle, Dolly.

There were now seven in the party, with one more to hear from.

The little detective soon showed up at a signal from Roaring Ralph, and they were now united. Bolly still kept in the background, for he did not believe the time had yet come to disclose himself.

As Pandey was still unaware of the fact that he was still in the land of the living, a few hours more or less could not possibly make any difference to him; and, while they were so near the village it might be dangerous to upset the old ranger in anyway, especially when they needed his advice and cool-headed ideas so much.

So Bolly remained in the background, and kept his face well-concealed. It chanced also that although old Pandey looked keenly at him on several occasions, as though weighing the probability of his ever having met him previous to this time, on each and every occasion Bolly chanced to be standing in the shadow of some tree that gave additional uncertainty to his form.

Led by Ellis, the little party at once started off through the forest.

They had not been gone over two minutes when a Blackfoot warrior crept out of a clump of bushes close by, where he had been hidden, and made towards the adjacent village at full speed.

In less than twenty minutes four score of determined and enraged Indians, many of whom bore torches, were upon the trail of the palefaces.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WAITING.

"FIDDLES an' fryin' pans, looky thar! I'm a roarin', tearin' thunderbolt from the Colorado Canyon, but I never seed the ekal o' thet sight, tar my heels for a 'Pache ef I did."

Roaring Ralph pointed, as he spoke, to the open forest below them.

The little band of fugitives stood upon the side of a hill that formed part of the chain leading to the mountains.

They had made splendid time since leaving the Indian village, and were now halting for a breathing spell, when the words of the reckless ranger at once drew their attention.

The wind was roaring through the gaps of the mountains, making a peculiar humming sound, and one could easily guess that a heavy storm was in progress somewhere which might descend upon them at any time, as the air seemed close and sultry, as though the coolness and moisture had all been sucked up by the storm.

From where they stood a good view could be had of the forest they had so lately left, although they were not so far above it.

What had attracted the attention of Roaring Ralph was a myriad of strange lights that were steadily advancing through the open wood.

It could not be called a procession, for there was no regularity at all about their progress, each one advancing at will.

They presented a strange and startling aspect from the position where our friends were situated, and looked more like an army of giant fire-flies than aught else.

No one knew better than they did, however, that each one of these mystic lights was grasped in the hand of a red warrior, and that it was no army of spirits, but a large band of vengeful Indians close upon their trail.

Although the sight may have been both astonishing and electrifying to the little band of whites, it did not have the effect of alarming them, at least to any great extent.

Dolly may have felt some apprehension, and the younger men also, but not one of them showed it by word or manner. As to the rest, men who had dared as much as they would not be apt to become alarmed because perils threatened.

To them danger was a daily pastime, incurred so often as to be unnoticed. Men in their avocations go through some deadly peril that was wont once upon a time to make their flesh creep with horror, and yet time has dulled that realization and it never once enters their mind.

Take, for instance, the locomotive driver, or an employee of a powder-mill, whom terrible danger constantly threatens, and you will be amazed

hear them laugh and joke like other men, as if unconscious of it all.

When the full force of the threatening danger became known to them, the old rangers prepared to meet it.

Without losing any more time, therefore, old Pandey declared that they must be moving forward, as the best and only thing they could do under the circumstances was to make a stand, and give the Blackfeet such a lesson that they would turn back and leave the trail that was so deadly to their tribe.

Up through the narrow canyon, then, they made their way, wholly unconscious of the fact that theirs had not been the only white feet that had tramped that narrow pass within the last twenty-four hours.

The ascent was rather difficult in places.

When the place was reached where they intended making their stand, another view of the forest could be obtained. The army of torches was still in view.

"Before half an hour is gone by we will have them here," remarked Blue Bill.

By this time the moon was hidden behind a bank of clouds in the west.

There was yet an hour or so before darkness would give way to dawn.

Their position was a singular one, and may perhaps need a little explanation—so that the events that followed can be readily understood.

Where the canyon ended there was a little grass-covered plateau, with the rocks rising behind it.

Upon this plateau they had halted.

The only way which seemed open to attack from the Indians was through the little canyon, and they felt capable of guarding this against all the force that could be brought against them.

Perhaps such determined men as the Blackfeet might find another means of ascent, but the whites were ready to risk it.

Unless the redskins managed to gain a point above them, the danger was not so very great; but, should this occur, they would find it a hard task to save themselves.

Meanwhile the Blackfeet were gradually drawing nearer.

They had entered the canyon far below, as was evidenced by the gleaming of torches.

The tug of war was drawing near.

Each man grasped his weapons resolutely, and took the place assigned him by Pandey Ellis, and fortune placed it so that the old man's pard was next to himself.

Then they waited.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TUG OF WAR.

THEY had not much time to remain in suspense. Being sure that the whites had entered the canyon, the Blackfeet pressed on.

Whether they expected that those whom they pursued would turn on them, it would be hard indeed to say, but the suspicion, if it did enter their minds, made no difference in the reckless haste with which they continued the pursuit.

Crouching above them were the seven whites.

The sharp crack of Pandey's faithful old rifle, Betsy Jane, was the first sound to break the dread silence.

Six other weapons immediately followed suit, and quite a storm of bullets was sent hurtling among the advancing redskins.

Although, no doubt, amazed at this sudden impediment offered to their progress, the redmen were too valiant to even think of giving up the fight as yet.

They rushed forward with loud yells that made the rocks above ring.

Another storm of bullets plowed through their ranks and many went down.

Death lay beyond, and yet there were men daring enough to rush forward.

If these fellows sought the grim monster they were speedily accommodated, for the same weapons that had belched out their leaden messengers upon the last lot of their comrades, were ready to perform the same kind of service for them.

Had it been a band of white men that was assaulting a position like this, they would have crept as near as possible without drawing fire, and then in a solid mass have charged forward.

With the Indians it was somewhat different. Their tactics have been from time immemorial to fight from behind trees, and their battles are more conducive to cunning and strategy than prowess and bravery.

Hence, it was, that when so many of their number went down before the deadly missiles of the whites, the remainder stood aghast at the terrible spectacle.

The storm of death from above had been too much for them, and immediate retreat seemed to be the prevailing idea in the minds of all; for they dropped their torches and vanished in a marvelously rapid manner.

No sooner had this occurred than old Pandey gave vent to a wild huzza.

"Whipped again, an' don't ye forget it!" he cried, leaping erect in his excitement.

"Sculps an' sausers! tie me up wid a Commanch, ef it ain't so. We kin lick ten times our weight in Blackfeet any day. Dust my Sunday breeches, ef we can't!" exclaimed one whose name it may not be necessary to state.

Bolly still remained quiet.

He resolved to wait until daylight now, and let his old partner make the startling discovery of his identity himself, when there would probably be a high old scene.

As for himself, he was just itching to get his arms around the old man, when he would make him feel whether he was in the land of the living, or had his toes turned up to the daisies.

It was now not over an hour to dawn, and the Indians had been too thoroughly whipped to think of immediate fight, at least so our friends thought.

It chanced, however, that when the torches were thrown down, some of the braves, instead of retreating, had fallen flat upon the rocks.

When silence once more reigned, and the balls no longer came from above, these worthies commenced crawling stealthily forward and upward, their objective point being, of course, the stone fort of the fugitives.

There were only half a dozen of these daring warriors.

When close to the summit they found a little opening in the left hand side of the canyon, by making use of which they were enabled to gain the rocks at a point where it had been deemed impossible by the whites for their red foes to climb upward.

Like so many gaunt specters, the redmen crawled on, one after another.

The top was finally reached.

One of them peered over the rock, saw the crouching forms at the terminus of the little canyon, and, with a motion for his comrades to come on, vanished over the rock.

His friends noticed that he gave a sort of spasmodic kick before disappearing, but took it for granted this was intentional on his part.

The first daring redskin had noticed a dark form crouching below when he poked his head over the rock, and the first intimation he had of such a presence was when an iron hand clutched his throat and a long, keen knife blade passed through his heart.

Nearer crept Indian No. 2.

He proceeded just as his unfortunate predecessor had done.

As soon as his eyes fell upon the little group at the head of the canyon he could see nothing else, and had no thought of danger from below until that mysterious hand gripped his throat.

Another redskin had passed in his checks, and there were now but four left.

No. 3 managed to give utterance to a half cry as Bolly Wheritt's hand closed over his throat, and after finishing him the ranger stood erect and sent a volley of balls over the rocks that effectually demolished the remaining two Indians.

This done, Bolly slipped away to avoid Pandey, who was lavish in his praise of Roaring Ralph's unknown friend.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE old ranger may have wondered who this strange friend of Roaring Ralph's was.

Several times the man's figure had seemed familiar to him in the semi-gloom, but he could not make out who it was.

When he praised the unknown's prowess to Roaring Ralph, he could not but notice that the old Colorado ranger acted in a queer manner, of which he could make nothing at the time, but which recurred forcibly to him a short time later.

Silence had now ensued, and it became evident that the Blackfeet did not mean to make a further assault.

What their plans were our friends could not, of course, even guess.

Reckless Rupert was stationed at a point a little separated from the others, for since the late affair, in which Ralph's unknown friend had figured so conspicuously, they knew not from what quarter an attack might come, not fully understanding the advent of this little band of redskins in a quarter they had deemed more than ordinarily secure.

One could easily guess where the thoughts of our young ranger were concentrated. His nearness to Dolly, together with the glances she had given him, had aroused within him the strong powers that had lain sleeping.

"What relation does she bear toward Silver Rifle?" was the thought that tortured the poor boy. "She may be his wife—is his sweetheart at any rate, for did not the colonel declare that he had taken Dolly away, and that there was an impassable gulf between them? Then what does she mean, looking at me in that way? Are they but friendly glances? Heaven keep me, my poor heart had construed them into love, and for her to love me, bound as she is to him, would be an act of treachery I could never forgive either in myself or her.

"The colonel hates him. What if I should hand the young couple over to him. Then my reward would come in the shape of Dolly's hand, but I would hate myself, and perhaps she would hate me. No, never will I sully my name with such a base act. Rather will I save them from the colonel's wrath, as I intended when I followed them, and then bid farewell to peace forever."

The agony of the young man was intense.

That Dolly was forever lost to him he had not the least doubt in the world, for if she belonged to Silver Rifle, Reckless Rupert was not the man to accept a second-hand love, even when his own was so fierce.

Meanwhile dawn was coming on, and quite a little scene was occurring in another part of the plateau.

Pandey Ellis was standing by himself near the spot where the canyon bebouched upon the plateau.

The light grew stronger, the eyes of the old ranger fell upon the ground, and he saw the tracks himself and little band had left in a patch of drift near by.

Mechanically the ranger picked out each one by the marks left in the soil.

Suddenly he started.

An exclamation fell from his lips that denoted both eagerness and amazement, and, bending down, he proceeded to examine the footprints that had caught his eye.

They were not those of Blue Bill, Silver Rifle, or Dolly, but before him he saw, plainly visible, the trail of the marked moccasin.

All at once Pandey stiffened up.

Heavens! what seemed to be the truth had darted into his mind like a flash, and he saw it all.

Roaring Ralph's unknown friend was Jack Wheritt, the murderer of his pard. Now he realized why the man's form had seemed so familiar.

Well, he must die.

Pandey Ellis drew his knife and then looked around him.

The unknown ranger was standing by the rock, his head resting on his arms.

Pandey walked over to him. The man did not stir until the old ranger laid the hand holding the knife upon his shoulder and said: "I am hyar ter avenge ther death o' my pard!"

Then the man looked up.

There are times when the tragic is somehow or other wonderfully mixed up with the ludicrous.

Fancy a man being charged with murdering himself.

When the man on whose shoulder Pandey Ellis had laid his hand raised his head, he looked the old ranger square in the eyes.

The light of the newly-born day now fell upon the countenance of the other, and revealed the well-known and loved face of his own Bolly Wheritt, with the white locks falling upon his shoulders.

Pandey Ellis was so thunderstruck that for the time being he could not move.

"My soul," he gasped, at length, "air it ye, Bolly? For Heaven's sake, tell me."

Thereupon Bolly fell upon his neck, and the two old rangers were united.

Of course all the amazement lay with Pandey, for he had looked upon his partner as dead, and even sworn his solemn oath of

vengeance upon the grave that was supposed to contain all that was mortal of Bolly.

The old man actually became a boy again in the exuberance of his joy, and alternately squeezed his chum, Blue Bill and the Colorado ranger.

Affairs were brought to their notice about this time, however, that demanded immediate attention.

Blue Bill made the discovery, that in some mysterious manner, the Indians had succeeded in gaining the rocks above, and were even then preparing to demolish those below by hurling rocks down upon them.

At this opportune moment, the little New York detective announced that he had found the very place, and an immediate rush for the rocks back of the plateau was made.

They would be safe in the cleft he had found, from the missiles of those above, but powerless to prevent the rest of the reds from ascending the canyon, and preparing for a rush upon them.

It was not fated, however, that they were to remain in this situation long, for the ever watchful Blue Bill discovered that the cleft they had entered, was in reality the entrance to a cave.

This being the case, it was deemed proper that some steps should be taken toward effecting an escape from their position.

First of all, they managed to procure some torches.

This was easily done, for a tree had once grown almost directly overhead, and its dead branches lay scattered around, where a bolt of lightning had sent them.

An immense rock stood conveniently near at hand, which their united strength could set moving, and it settled into the crevice, filling it entirely.

Satisfied with their work, the whites lighted one of their torches, and began the exploration of the great cavern into which fortune seemed to have directed them.

Ten minutes had hardly passed away, before a dusky form swept on to the platform, and finding it empty, signaled for the rest of the lively Blackfeet to appear.

"Hist!"

At this thrilling, hissing whisper, our friends came to a sudden halt.

Pandy Ellis, who carried the torch, had thrust it into a pool of water at his side, so that with marvelous quickness darkness had come upon the scene.

He had seen a light ahead, and as their own torch was extinguished, the others also discovered it. Pandy was a man never to be caught napping, and he quickly made up his mind to discover what this meant.

It could not be the sun, for dawn was just about breaking.

So he left them there, and began making his way cautiously forward.

When he had turned several bends, he found himself looking upon a curious scene.

At first he thought it was a band of trappers encamped in the cavern, but quickly realized his mistake.

This was the new abode of the border money-makers whom Roaring Ralph had worried into destroying their old cabin home, with himself in it, as they thought.

They were the ones who had ascended the canyon as far as it was practicable in advance of our friends.

Of course, they must look upon the money-makers as deadly foes, for such they would undoubtedly prove be in a conflict; and, besides, they were allies of the Indians.

When Pandy Ellis made his way back to the others, and reported what he had seen, a hurried council took place.

The little detective was terribly anxious to be at them, and as there was no other way out of the matter, the others soon agreed with him.

A forward movement was at once commenced. Dolly was placed in the rear, so as to be out of the way of stray bullets, and then the little band advanced slowly along the passage-way, led by Pandy and his old Pard.

The money-makers only numbered about nine in all.

They were busy when our friends suddenly

burst upon them; but, knowing what capture meant, they offered resistance.

Yellow Bob was amazed to find in the antagonist who crossed knives with him, the man whom he had so much cause to hate, and whom he thought had surely been cremated with the cabin; but, for the time, he became a human wildcat, and slashed away with such a vim that the Colorado ranger, in duty bound, soon felt compelled to give him his quietus.

It was not long before the battle was over. Three money-makers, besides the leader, remained as prisoners in their hands, and the rest had gone to that bourne whence no traveler e'er returns.

They once more moved forward.

It soon turned out just as our friends suspected it would.

There were two entrances.

One of the fellows had escaped during the melee and vanished down the passage in an opposite direction to that from which they had come, and forming their ideas from this, they hurried forward.

Before ten minutes had elapsed after this second start they were in the open air and hurrying forward.

The Indians, unfortunately, were well acquainted with the strange cavern, and finding one entrance barred, hastened around to the other, where they came upon a fresh trail.

Our friends were again at bay.

This time the situation was not so wholly in their favor, for the ground was more level, and their breastworks detached rocks.

The redskins had followed them with the keenness and pertinacity of sleuth hounds, finally overtaking them here.

One rush had been made, but the deadly rifles of the whites had warned them that this system of tactics would not be tolerated, and they withdrew to a distance.

Pandy Ellis had freed the hands of the prisoners, and placing their own revolvers in them, sternly ordered them to fire; and that the first man who refused to obey would suffer for it they readily knew.

Perhaps their shots were not so effective as those of the others, but they did not dare to shoot wild while the old veteran's keen eyes were upon them, and the Indians were rushing forward in a body, so that in all probability some of their bullets told.

Reckless Rupert watched Dolly with the carefulness of a brother, and did everything he could for her comfort.

To his surprise, Silver Rifle seemed in no wise jealous at his attentions.

Was he tired of the prairie belle, and glad to get her off his hands? Rupert grew indignant in his heart.

"If he has deceived her an iota, by my faith, his life shall answer for it. I will be a brother to her, since fate has denied me the right to a dearer relation," he murmured.

Afternoon came, and still the situation remained unchanged.

The Blackfeet had rigged up a moving barricade, made from small trees that had been felled and fastened together.

Behind this a score of them had advanced, and found shelter among some loose rocks that were connected with those behind which our friends knelt.

Then the barricade was lugged slowly back, probably with the intention of bringing out a score more.

The little detective declared himself able to dislodge those who had taken refuge among the rocks, and proceeded to do so.

From his pocket he drew out a rubber sling and a small box, which, upon being opened, disclosed a dozen balls of intense blackness, about the size of marbles.

While the rangers stood ready with their rifles, the detective drew back his rubber sling and discharged the ball.

He followed it up with several more in rapid succession.

The first shock had probably stunned the Blackfeet. As the others came they dashed out like so many crazy men.

Then the trappers' rifles cracked merrily,

and quite a number of the red nomads of the Northwest fell to rise no more.

At about the same time the cheery sound of a cavalry bugle was heard, and the Blackfeet were discovered racing everywhere in a panic stricken way, with the United States soldiers pursuing them.

"You are lost," said Reckless Rupert, turning to Silver Rifle, but the young prairie sharpshooter smiled and shook his head.

While his men were pursuing the terrified Blackfeet in all directions, chasing them like so many sheep, hewing and shooting them down, the colonel rode toward the little company of fugitives.

Reckless Rupert knew that the crisis was at hand.

As the colonel drew nearer, Silver Rifle spoke a few words to the little detective.

"The colonel drew rein.

"Dolly," he said, sternly, and yet with a pathetic ring in his voice, "I have sought you far and near. Will you return to your heart-broken father, or remain with this young scoundrel, who has disgraced the name he bears?"

"Father, you have been unjust toward Lewis. My love for you has never wavered but still I shall cling to him so—"

"Choose then between us!" thundered the old colonel, interrupting her.

She did not hesitate. Her arms were around the neck of the sharpshooter, who stood there proud but silent.

"Hear me then, father. You have shut the truth out of your heart and refused to let Lewis clear himself. Because he is innocent I cling to him so long as life lasts," she said.

"So be it," muttered the old colonel, almost choking, as he turned his steed, "so be it. I will now return to my home. The weight of sorrow will soon lay me beside your mother in the grave."

"Hold!" cried a voice. "I have something to say about this, Col. Harvey. I am Jean Barthol, Secret Service Detective. You knew me well once, Col. Harvey. I know all about this affair. Yellow Bob here, alias Robert Stackpole, is the guilty man, as can be easily proven. Your son Lewis is as innocent as I. Come with me a few minutes, and I will convince you of this."

Reckless Rupert stood aghast.

Silver Rifle, her brother!

He went up and took each of their hands.

Not a word could he say, but Dolly blushed furiously, and the welcome tidings that she loved him was conveyed to the young man's heart.

Soon the impulsive colonel came dashing up, and leaping to the ground, threw his arms around Lewis, begging him to forgive and forget, which the noble young man was eager to do.

All was joy and peace, but it could not last. Pandy and his fellow rangers held a sort of council, and decided that they had better be moving without any waste of time, for soon Big Buffalo would gather the adjacent tribes, and the country would be too hot for them.

They were followed by a large band of furious Blackfeet, but with the aid of the Gatling gun and the shrewd scouts, the Indians were defeated and they reached the fort in safety.

Reckless Rupert gave up his trapper life, and after marrying the colonel's daughter settled down to private life, being possessed of means.

Pandy and his dear old pard, after seeing Rupert married and dancing at the affair started for Leadville, where, of course, new adventures awaited them. Sam Wherritt learned the truth, but preferred to remain with the Indians.

Blue Bill and queer old Roaring Ralph Rockwood also turned in the direction of the silver mines, while Lasso Rube and Mexican Mose went South.

Silver Rifle resumed his place as a young army officer, and thinks there is no girl in the world equal to his sister Dolly. As to the Indian girl, Singing Swan, he carried her away from the Blackfeet, discovered that she was a white girl adopted into the tribe, found her parents, and ended by making her his wife.